

# MUHAMMAD THE IDEAL PROPHET

محمد ﷺ النبي المصطفى

Saiyid Sulayman Nadwi

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC FEDERATION OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

IN THE NAME OF  
**ALLAH**  
THE ALL-COMPASSIONATE, ALL-MERCIFUL



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**Muhammad**  
**The Ideal Prophet**

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# TRANSLITERATION CHART

أ	a
آ . آى	â
ب	b
ت	t
	h or t (when followed by another Arabic word)
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ

ظ	<u>dh</u>
ع	‘
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
هـ - ه - هـ	h
و	w
و (as a long vowel)	oo
ي	y
ي (as a long vowel)	ee
ء	’ (Omitted in initial position)

َ	Fatḥah	a
ِ	Kasrah	i
ُ	Ḍammah	u
ّ	Shaddah	Double letter
◌◌◌	Sukoon	Absence of vowel

# FOREWORD

A work by a scholar of Mawlânâ Saiyid Sulaymân Nadwi's eminence needs no introduction. Besides his numerous works of lasting value, the late Mawlânâ's *Seerat an-Nabi*, the great Urdu biography of the Prophet, would have alone been sufficient for the recognition of his literary acumen and wide knowledge. The encyclopaedic sweep of the *Seerat an-Nabi*, places it in the category of works undertaken by literary academies rather than by a single scholar. In fact, the late Mawlânâ's scholarship of rare distinction coupled with his piety and earnestness for the cause of God had placed him in the line of great worthies of Islam.

The contents of this volume were delivered by the late Mawlânâ as extension lectures at Madras, in October-November, 1925, under the auspices of the Muslim Educational Society of Southern India, founded by the late Seth M. Jamal Muhammad. Later on, Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal's, 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' came into existence in the shape of discourses delivered from that forum. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthal and Mawlânâ 'Abdul-Mâjid Daryâbâdi, the two savants of the Qur'an, were some of the other scholars who also delivered lectures at Madras on different subjects on the invitation of the Muslim Educational Society.

Mawlânâ Saiyid Sulaymân Nadwi regarded these lectures, published later under the title of *Khuṭabât-e-Madrâs* (Madras Lectures), as his best work. The portrayal of the Prophet's character by the author is not only vivid and convincing but also graceful and

intensely living: he is inspired and inspires others. He has produced a sketch which must be the delight even of those who have an access to the vast stores of information on the subject. These lectures present, without any doubt, a quintessence of the *Seerat an-Nabi*. It might, however, be mentioned here, as the author had made it a point to explain in his preface of the third edition of this book, that according to the belief of the Muslims all the apostles of God were impeccable, sinless and perfect guides of humanity; yet, the comparisons attempted between them as the last Prophet, Muhammad, (on whom be peace and blessings of Allah), are meant to highlight the distinctive features of the abiding ideal for the life of mankind. These comparisons have been made in the light of extant scriptures of the earlier prophets and founders of religions and the writings of their own followers. There is, nevertheless, nothing disparaging in them to the founder of any religion for the God Himself says:

«Of these messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others...» (Qur'an 2: 253)

A few English translations of the *Khutabât-e-Madrâs* have already appeared earlier, but, I believe, no excuse is needed for this fresh attempt. A classic of universal importance, as these lectures undoubtedly are, needs always to be presented anew in different languages for the benefit of those who are not conversant with the language in which it is originally written. I do not claim to have attempted a literal translation but my rendering would be found to follow the text as faithfully as possible without sacrificing the mood and tenor of the lectures. I would deem myself successful if I am able to convey the contents of these lectures along with their vigour and warmth.

I have added a few references, as well as footnotes, besides the glossary, bibliography, etc., which, I hope, would increase the utility of the book.

Lastly, I have to return my best thanks to my friend, Mr. Abrar Ahmad Khan, for carefully going through my manuscript, and for making several valuable suggestions.

MUHIUDDIN AHMAD

Lucknow, India



# One

## PROPHETS

### The Perfect Models for Humanity

This is a magical world brimming with wonders, diverse and remarkable. One finds here myriads of beings and creatures with distinct characteristics. If one were to cast a glance over different objects, one would find, that sensibility and consciousness go on increasing gradually from inorganic matter to human beings. The smallest particle of the universal kingdom known as ether or atom is deprived of all sense perception and consciousness but a faint trace of life appears in the minerals. In the vegetable kingdom sensitiveness of an involuntary nature is discernible in the form of germination and growth while a still higher type of sensibility accompanied by a limited consciousness can be seen in the animal life. Then in man, the sense perception reaches its perfection with the appearance of volition and consciousness. The inorganic matter is, accordingly, free from every kind of responsibility; vegetables respond to the law of life and death; animals are liable to a bit higher responsiveness; while man has to shoulder the responsibility of everything done by him. In the case of man, too, this responsibility varies according to his sensibility, consciousness and will: the dolts and the lunatics, the children and the adults and the learned and the sapient are

accountable for their actions in proportion to the lack or abundance of these powers.

Now, let us examine this question from another angle. Nature takes upon herself the responsibility to sustain beings and creatures to the extent they lack sensibility, consciousness and volition; she goes on shifting her responsibility to each in proportion to these potentialities developed by it. Who rears the diamonds and rubies in the bosom of mountains and who feeds the fish in the oceans? The wild animals are brought up by whom? Who provides nourishment to fowls in the air and who attends to their ailments and illness? Why do the animals of the same species living in mountains and jungles, under different climatic conditions, develop different characteristics? Why are the dogs of Europe different in appearance from those in Africa? Why does nature provide them with different types of paws and furs and skins according to different physical and climatic conditions?

These differences indicate the ways in which nature helps every being in such ways, as it lacks will and consciousness and withdraws its care to the extent each develops the potentialities helpful to maintain itself. Man has to earn his own living. He has to cultivate and grow foodstuff for meeting his needs. He has also not been provided with the coat of short and fine soft hair as some of the animals do have for protecting themselves against the rigours of climate. Likewise, he himself has to cure his illness and heal his wounds.

On the other hand, nature undertakes the responsibility of protecting other creations, to the extent they lack will and perception, against their enemies. She arms them with different coats of mail: to some are given claws and canine teeth, horn to others; some are taught to fly, or to swim, or to run; while others fend off their enemies by biting or stinging. But, look at the man. The poor fellow has

neither the tusks of the elephant, nor the claws of the lion, nor even the horns or pointed teeth or stings and poison glands. He has been created weak and defenceless but the great weapons of sense perception, consciousness and volition at his command more than make up for his deficiencies and enable him to subdue powerful elephants and ferocious lions. He can catch poisonous snakes, birds flying in the air and fishes living in high waters. He can contrive a variety of arms and armaments for his defence.

To whichever philosophy or religion you may subscribe, you would nonetheless agree that man is held responsible for his actions by virtue of possessing the senses and consciousness and intellect as well as will and determination. The, responsibility devolving on man is known, in the phraseology of Islam, as *takleef shar'ee* or religious obligation, which is laid on every man according to his competence depending on his strength and puissance. The guiding principle as laid down by God in this regard is:

«Allah tasks not a soul beyond its scope...» (Qur'an 2: 286)

This is the bounden duty lying on man which has been alluded to in the Qur'an as *amânah* or divine trust — a trust which was first offered to the minerals within the earth and the lofty mountains and the heavens higher up in the skies, but none had the courage to shoulder this onerous responsibility.

«Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! He has proved a tyrant and a fool.» (Qur'an 33: 72)

The burdensome trust undertaken by man has been pithily expressed by a poet<sup>1</sup> who says:

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<sup>1</sup> Hâfidh of Shirâz, Iran.

“The heavens shrank to bear the burden of Trust,  
To my lot it fell as the dice was cast.”

For tyranny signifies, in its ultimate analysis, a behaviour exceeding one's limits, the tyrants are more often foolish enthusiasts. Likewise, ignorance is nothing but intemperateness of intellect. The antithesis of tyranny is justice and moderation and that of ignorance, knowledge and understanding. And, since man is by nature inclined towards extravagance and immoderation, he requires knowledge and constraint to enlighten his path. This is why the Qur'an speaks of these two, knowledge and moderation, as faith and righteousness.

﴿By the declining day [token of time (through the ages)], Lo! Man is in a state of loss, save those who believed and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance.﴾

*(Qur'an 103: 1-3)*

The “loss” spoken of in this verse is intemperance or ignorance, which is counter-balanced by faith and good deeds. God cites “the declining day” or the time as witness to man's loss because the past of mankind bears a testimony to his excesses and overdoings. For the great majority of people have always been a pawn in the game of a few enthusiasts and over-ambitious persons, Thomas Carlyle has aptly remarked that “the history of the world is but a biography of great men.” History of the world tends to show that the peoples and nations have ever been exploited and taxed by their compatriots save when they have not been deprived of faith and righteousness. This has invariably been the cause of decay and extinction of every nation.

Read the scripture of any religion or the homilies teaching moral lessons and you would see that the same drama of conflict between knowledge and ignorance, between tyranny and justice has been enacted in different ways. You would find faith and

righteousness arrayed against the forces of darkness and ignorance, tyranny and disbelief: it is always the story of those upholding higher human virtues locked in battle against the wicked and the iniquitous. What are, after all, the great epics like the *Iliad* of the Greeks, the *parallel Lives* of the Romans, the *Shâhnâmah* of the Iranians and the *Râmâyana* and *Mahâbhârata* of the Hindus? Every nation has had similar events in its life or that of the founder of an era who had enkindled and kept alive the heroism and the urge of the people to fight the evil. These epics speak of these great events so as to teach every nation that it should give up the ways of wickedness and take to the path of virtue and goodness.

What do the major portion of the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels and the Qur'an consist of? They tell us the stories of ruination of the wicked and disbelieving people spreading corruption on the earth, and of the rise of virtuous, and pious in their place, so that we may take a lesson from them and become virtuous, just and God fearing. This is why all the prophets and saints of yore were sent by God — they taught the ways of virtuous living to the nations of old — and then came the last of them, as a mercy for the whole mankind, so that his life may serve as a beacon of light and guidance for mankind to the end of time. This is what the Qur'an declares in these words through the Prophet of Islam.

﴿... I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it [came to me]. Have you then no sense?﴾  
(Qur'an 10: 16)

The revelation from God sets forth, in this verse, the life of the holy Prophet as an intrinsic evidence of his prophethood.

History has, however, preserved the life-stories of men, thousands in number, who had achieved eminence in one field or the other. All of them have left their imprints on the pages of history. There are amongst them emperors surrounded by the splendour of

royal courts, an array of military commanders and generals, philosophers lost in their thoughts, mighty conquerors intoxicated with power, poets singing to cheer their own solitude with sweet songs and the affluent rolling in riches. All of them have an attraction of their own for the sons of Adam. Whether it be Hannibal of Carthage, or Alexander of Macedonia, or Caesar of Rome, or Darius of Iran, or yet Napoleon of France, the life of each has a fascination for the posterity. Similarly alluring are the lives of all philosophers from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Diogenes of the ancients to Spencer of England. Even the lives of Nimrod and Pharaoh, Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab and Korah depict yet another trait of human nature and character; but the question is, who, amongst these, can be deemed as a model of goodness and virtue fit to be followed by other human beings?

Great generals and conquerors, indeed, were they, who swept everything before them by their sword, but did they also succeed in leaving and ennobling example of their lives to be followed by others? They had won brilliant victories, but were they able to cut the shackles of superstition and credulous beliefs? Did they solve any social problem besetting equality and brotherhood of human beings? Did they succeed in restoring our moral and spiritual health and happiness or in eradicating the faults and failings of our desires? Did they present any model of moral rectitude and decorous behaviour for the posterity?

World has given birth to great poets. But, these were painters of fantasy, merely starry-eyed Utopians unfit to be assigned any place in the *Republic* of Plato. They have solved no problem of man, since Homer to this day, save feeding the fire of human emotions and helping man's imagination to run riot with their visions and dreams. No practical model of righteous action could they ever produce with their musical thoughts and rhythmical creations. How correctly the

Qur'an brings in its verdict on the poets.:

﴿... As for the poets, the erring follow them, Have you not seen how they stray in every valley,

And how they say that which they do not? Save those who believe and do good work...﴾  
(*Qur'an* 26: 224-227)

The Qur'an also tells us why the exquisite expressions of the verse-makers have been of little use to humanity. They run after every idea aimlessly without any set purpose; more often sinking to the depth of human folly rather than soaring in the height of divine light. The poetry emanating from minds steeped in faith can, sometimes, be effective and enlightening and a restorer of truth and justice. History of the world, however, bears ample proof of the unprofitableness of the poets.

There have been sages and philosophers who have plumbed the secrets of nature beyond the ken of perception and changed the concept of things and materials. They have, nevertheless, failed to produce any blueprint for the practical guidance of humanity. For their flight of imagination lacked practical wisdom, they could never provide man with any guidance in the discharge of his obligations. Aristotle was the precursor of ethical philosophy, now studied in every university. His brilliant exposition of ethical impulses is esteemed highly both by the learned and the learners, but how many of them have been able to betake the path of virtue by reading his dissertations? Teachers well-versed in ethical philosophy can be found almost in every institution of higher learning, who know all about its premises and principles, but has their impact been ever felt beyond their class-rooms? On the contrary, we find that very often their conduct and behaviour are no better than those of the man on the street. To walk in the right path one has not to hear the sermons but to see the living examples of cardinal virtues.

Powerful kings and emperors have also appeared on the stage of this world. They have extended their dominions, played with the life and property of their fellow beings, extracted wealth through taxes and tithes from some and bestowed their bounties on others. They have demeaned one to exalt the other. The book of God presents, in the words of the Queen of Sheba, this rare picture of their doings on the earth.

﴿... Lo! Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honour of its people shame...﴾ (*Qur'an* 27: 34)

The swords of mighty kings have hanged over the heads of criminals in thoroughfares and market places, but they have failed to reach the guilt concealed in the minds and hearts of men. They have enforced law and order in the habitations and townships, but the kingdom of spirit has ever been beyond their reach, or, rather, their own courts and castles have been the breeding dens of moral confusion and spiritual anarchy. What else have the kings like Alexanders and Caesars left for us?

How many lawgivers has the world seen from Solon to this day? Their laws were not only short-lived but have also failed to cleanse the hearts and purify the morals. Subsequent rulers always placed a new set of laws on the statute book, albeit more often to further their own interests than to enforce the rules of equity. The world has not changed even today. Still, the legislatures in every country make and unmake laws endlessly, but seldom their labours are for the benefit of the people whom they profess to represent. It is more the interest of the powers that be which they seek to promote.

These are, broadly, the higher sections of society which could be expected to work for the welfare of humanity. If you give further thought to the matter you would see that whatever light of goodness and virtue you find in the world today, it owes its existence to the

pure-hearted souls whom you know by the name of prophets and messengers of God. Wherever you come across compassion and justice and a sincere desire to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the downtrodden, no matter whether these are found in the cave of a mountain or a dense forest or a populous city, they are due to the call given by one of these men of God.

The Qur'an tells us:

«... There was no nation but a Warner has passed among them.»  
(*Qur'an* 35: 24)

«... For every folk a guide...»  
(*Qur'an* 13: 7)

The lustre of their teachings is to be found in every country and nation: the savages of Africa and the civilised nations of Europe are both equally indebted to them for edification of their souls. Of all the groups of men we have mentioned afore, the most august are they, for they rule not over the bodies of men like the kings, but their authority is enshrined in the hearts of the people. Their kingdom is not of lands and countries, but of hearts and spirits: they do not wield the sword, yet they obliterate the stains of guilt and peccancy at one stroke; they are not dreamy-eyed song-smiths, yet the sweetness of their speech delights the soul; they are neither senators nor law-makers, yet the laws given by them regulate the conduct of statesmen and judges, kings and subjects from age to age.

This is not a question of faith or conviction but a matter of fact and history. One has to see whether it has actually been so or not. The edicts of Patliputra's Ashoka (India) are engraved on the pillars of stones, but those of the Buddha are inscribed in the hearts of people. The decrees of the rulers of Ujjain, Hastinapur, Delhi and Kannauj are no more to be found today, but the *Dharma Shâstra* of Mânû still prevails. The statutes of Hammurabi, the King of Babel, have long

been buried under the dust, but Abraham's teachings are still alive! Pharaoh's imprudent demand to pay divine honours to him was as transient as the clouds, but Moses still lives in his teachings. How long did the laws of Solon remain in force, but the laws of Torah are still the measure of justice! The Roman Law which nailed the Jesus Christ to the cross became extinct long ago, but the doctrines of love that flowed from the lips of Jesus still redeem the wrongdoers, and as per their belief, wash them of their sins. The Abu Jahls of Makkah, the Chosroes of Iran and the Caesars of Rome are all dead and gone, but the Lord of Madeenah still rules over the hearts of people in every part of the world.

If these facts are correct, one would have to concede, not on grounds of faith, but through reason and logic of stubborn facts, that no other class of people except the prophets has worked for the welfare and happiness of mankind in its truest sense; theirs was the endeavour consisting of virtue and goodness, purity of heart, moderation and temperance. They all came to this world as messengers of God to preach the gospel of Truth and Faith, and they left their footsteps of righteousness to be followed by the coming generations. It is from their teachings alone that the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor and the learned and the illiterate can derive equal benefit.

«That is Our argument. We gave it unto Abraham against his folk. We raise unto degrees of wisdom whom we will. Lo! Your Lord is Wise, Aware.

And we granted him Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did we guide aforetime; and of his seed [We guided] David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do we reward the good.

And Zachariah and John and Jesus and Elias. Each one [of them] was of the righteous.

And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot. Each one [of them] did We prefer above [Our] creatures,  
With some of their forefathers and their off-spring and their brethren;  
and We chose them and guided them unto a straight path.  
Such is the guidance of Allah wherewith He guides whom He will of His bondsmen. But if they had set up [for worship] anything beside Him, [all] that they did would have been vain.  
Those are they unto whom We gave the scripture and command and prophethood. But if these disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein.  
Those are they whom Allah guides, so follow their guidance...﴾

*(Qur'an 6: 83-90)*

These, luminous verses of the Qur'an speak of a particular group among men, some of whom have been mentioned by name, who had been sent to cure the spiritual ailments of mankind and restore its moral health. They were men, holy and angelic in spirit, who preached the word of God in different times and climes and in every land. Whatever of moral rectitude and righteousness, purity and chastity man possesses today, it is all their legacy, and in following their footsteps alone lies the salvation and well-being of humanity.

The prophets adorn and illuminate the soul of man: the zealous preaching of Noah, the unshakable principle of God's oneness upheld by Abraham, the patrimony of resignation to Divine will bequeathed by Isaac, the self sacrifice of Ishmael, the indefatigable efforts of Moses, the faithfulness of Aaron, the self-resignation of Jacob, the lamentations of David, the wisdom of Solomon; the litanies of Zachariah, the chastity of John, the piety of Jesus, the penitence of Jonah, the strenuous exertion of Lot and the endurance of Job have made the life of man winsome and bright. To these consecrated souls can be traced every virtue and goodness found in the world today.

There is, however, no denying the fact that culture and civilisation, progress and improvement, in short, everything that has contributed towards welfare and material progress of mankind and helped man to raise himself to the level of vicegerent of God on earth, has been brought about by the combined effort of all men. Astronomers have discovered the movements of heavenly bodies, chemists have found out the properties of substances, physicians have searched the medicines for curing diseases, architects have developed the science and designs of structures and artisans have given birth to useful crafts and fine arts, and all of them have thus a share in the making of our world. We ought to be thankful to all of them. Nevertheless, we are even more obliged to offer our thanks to those who have decorated the world with us. They are the physicians who have cured us of our greed and envy, diagnosed the ailments of our souls and refurbished its lost energy and vigour. They elaborated our behaviour patterns and aptitudes, ideas and intentions and showed us the way of attaining purity of heart and sublimity of spirit. It was through the efforts of these God-moved souls that the cultural attainments were refined and embellished, the link between man and God, the slave and the Lord, was established. How could the world have attained its excellence if we had been denied the knowledge received through prophetic teachings? We are, verily, indebted more to these men of God than to any other class or group of persons. This is the compliment due to the prophets of God and it ought to be paid by all of us whenever their name comes on the lips of anyone. And, this is the benediction taught by Islam to be offered for them — ‘O’ God! Have mercy and peace on all of them.’

For nothing in this fleeting world is eternal, these impeccable guides of humanity had also to make their exit from this fleeting world and go to their everlasting home after they had completed the task for which they had been sent by God. The subsequent

generations have thus to preserve the records of their lives, sayings and doings. In fact, the documented portraits of the masters of old and the records of their achievements going by the name of history and biography are the only means for conserving the arts and sciences, discoveries and ideas of the earlier generations. We have undoubtedly some lesson in every past experience and, for that reason, the purification of our spirits and morals depends on following in the footsteps of these exalted teachers of morality and their pure-hearted followers. People have hitherto drawn inspiration from their sublime example and shall continue to do so in future also. We are, therefore, duty-bound, more than anything else, to preserve the accounts and endeavours of the prophets for our own guidance and betterment.

But, no philosophy, no education and no teaching, howsoever elevated and exalted, can inspire the people unless its preacher or teacher has a loving personality capable of commanding the affection and reverence of his followers. Recently, when I was returning home in February, 1924, after a brief visit to Hijaz and Egypt, I happened to enjoy the company of the celebrated poet, Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, who was coming back from America by the same ship. A fellow passenger asked Tagore:

“How is it that Brahmo Samaj has not succeeded in its mission although its creed was exceedingly fair, it enjoined reverence to all religions and their founders; and its fundamental principles, being exceedingly logical and satisfying were formulated in the light of modern science and philosophy?”

The poet-philosopher reached the core of the matter when he replied:

“It could not fare well because it had no personality behind it to set up a practical example and attract and inspire the people.”

Truly, no religion can succeed without the shining example of a gifted teacher.

We, thus, need men of God, pure-hearted and impeccable, who are specimen of human perfection, for our guidance and salvation. May Allah bless them all.

## Two

# MUHAMMAD

## The Ideal Prophet

Man needs the light of his past experiences to brighten his present and future. And, as I told you earlier, all the different segments of humanity which have done anything to make this world a better place to live in deserve our gratitude; but, the most deserving of our regard are those whom we call the prophets of God. Each one of them has, in his own time, presented a winsome example of his sublime conduct and moral behaviour. If one was a model of endurance, others were emblems of selflessness, sacrifice, fervour for Truth and Oneness of God, submission to the Will of the Lord, chastity and piety, in short, each of them was a lighthouse of guidance showing the path of exalted behaviour in one or the other walk of life everyman has to tread in his sojourn on the earth. Man, however, stood in the need of another guide who could illuminate the entire gamut of human behaviour, in all its manifoldness, by his comprehensive example of goodness and virtue. Man, in other words, needed a perfect and universal exemplar who could place in his hands a guide-book of practical life, so that every wayfarer may reach his destination safely. And, this exemplar did come to the world in the person of the last of the prophets, Muhammad, on whom be

peace and blessings of the Lord. The Qur'an announced this gospel truth in these words:

«O' Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a Warner. And as a summoner unto Allah by His permission, and, as a lamp that gives light.»      (*Qur'an 33: 45-46*)

He is the prophet well-informed, the witness to God's commandments, the bringer of glad tidings, the warner unto those who are heedless, the summoner of the erring to the way of God, the resplendent light which dispels the darkness and shows the right path.

Every prophet of God came to this world as a witness, or a harbinger of good tidings, or as a Warner, or as a summoner, but never in the past there came a prophet who combined all these qualities. There were witnesses to God's majesty and over-lordship like Jacob, Isaac and Ishmael. Others like Abraham and Jesus were the heralds of glad tidings. There were also warners like Noah, Moses, Hud and Shu'ayb, the key-note of whose forebodings was terrible punishment awaiting the evildoers. Then, there were the prophets like Joseph and Jonah whose teachings set the tone for summoners to divine guidance. But the messenger *par excellence* who had all these marks of prophet-hood — a witness as well as a welcomer, a warner as well as a caller — and who was a distinguished Apostle in every respect was none else save Muhammad (Blessings and peace be upon him). He was sent to the world as the last Prophet, the final one, after whom no other messenger was to be sent again by God. This is the reason why he was granted a shari'ah or the law that was perfect and final requiring no revision in the days to come.

For the teachings of the last prophet were to be ever-abiding, to remain unchanged to the end of time, he was sent as an acme of perfection with ever-blooming guidance and resplendent light. This

is an indisputable fact attested by the pages of history.

A character held out as an ideal or model for humanity needs must fulfil certain conditions before such a claim can be universally accepted. The first and foremost test to which the character of such a guide should be put is historicity.

Historicity means that the genuineness of the accounts of life and character of any man put forth as a perfect exemplar should proceed not from any fable or a legendary tale, but from reputed sources and methodical records of what we call as history. Man is never disposed, by his frame of mind, to be deeply impressed by any happening, event or biography which he knows to be fictitious. For a lasting impression of any character, one needs the assurance that every detail of the life, saying and doing of such a personality is perfectly genuine and verifiable. Historical stories have, for that very reason, a greater appeal than the works of fiction. Another reason for the historicity of a character, particularly if it is intended to impart a lesson to others, is that no bed-time fable, told to while away the hours of leisure, can be deemed to hold up a model for emulation or following its example. For nobody can be expected to follow a mythical or imaginary character, it is absolutely essential that the journal of life presented as an emblem of virtuous human conduct should be perfectly authentic in accordance with the criterion set for acceptance of any event as historical.

We hold all the prophets of God in reverence and pay homage to them. We also agree that every one of them was truthful messenger of divine guidance but the Lord has Himself told us that —

﴿Of these messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others...﴾ (*Qur'an* 2: 253)

We believe that this was the honour granted to Muhammad since he was the last of the line of prophets, bearer of the final and ever-

abiding message of God and, thus, he was sent as a standard of virtue and goodness for the guidance of mankind to the end of time. No other prophet than he was intended to be the seal of the divine messengers; nor were the teachings of any other prophet to last till the Doomsday. They were all sent as models, teachers and guides, no doubt; but for a particular age and people, and, hence, whatever they had taught gradually vanished from the memory of humanity.

Now, let us think it over again. How many apostles were sent by God to this world, to all the nations and countries? Their number must run into hundreds of thousands. Be that as it may, Islamic traditions put the figure at one hundred and twenty-four thousand although the Qur'an tells us the names of a few only. But, even of those whose names we know, how little of their life and character is known to the world? Although there are no means to verify it, the Hindus claim that their's was the oldest civilization of the world. Their sacred writings mention innumerable sages, but is there one to be put forth as a historical personality? There are many amongst these saints and sages about whom nothing except their names are known to us; there are others who can be treated as mythological personalities rather than characters belonging to the realm of history. More detailed knowledge of the noble personages described in the *Mahâbhârata* and *Râmâyana* are undoubtedly available, but can their lives be tested on the touchstone of history? Nobody knows the age, or the era, or the century, or the year, or period when they lived. Certain European orientalists have, of late, hazarded their opinion when these sages would have been living, but this is the only evidence available about their historicity. A majority of these experts do not even regard them as historical and deny that the mythological personalities described in these books were ever born on this earth.

Zoroaster, the founder of ancient Iranian faith named after him, is still revered by a large number of people, but his historical

personality is also hidden behind the mist of obscurity. Several sceptical orientalists of Europe and America have doubts if a man with this name ever lived in this world. Even the scholars who accept Zoroaster's historical existence, have succeeded in giving, through guess-work, some paltry details about his life. These accounts are so contradictory that no reasonable standard of practical human life can be based on them. Where was Zoroaster born, what was the year, what was his nationality or family, what was the religion he preached, whether the scripture attributed to him is genuine, what was the language spoken by him, when and where he died — each of these questions has elicited a hundred contradictory answers since no authentic and dependable records about him are available to clear the mist of doubt and uncertainty shrouding Zoroaster's personality. The Zoroastrians, or the Parsees, as they are known nowadays, lack acknowledged traditions about their Master and have to depend on the researches of European scholars for answering these questions. Their national sources do not go beyond Firdawsi's *Shâhnâma*. It is hardly an excuse that the Greek invaders of Iran had destroyed their scriptures; the point is that they exist no more. The very fact of their destruction settles the issue that the teachings of Zoroaster, whatever they had been, were not meant to be ever-abiding. This, by the way, is the reason why orientalists like Kern and Darmeteter refuse to accept Zoroaster as a historical figure.

Another religion of ancient Asia was Buddhism which was once the dominant faith of the people of India, China, the whole of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Turkistan and is still a living faith in Burma, Indo-China, China, Japan and Tibet. It was exterminated in India by Brahmanism and replaced by Islam in the Central Asia, but the power it commanded in South-Asia still sustains its faith and culture. Nevertheless, has its continued existence in several countries succeeded in preserving the dependable annals of Buddha's life and

work? The age when the Buddha lived is calculated with reference to the time of Rajas of Magadh, which, in turn, is fixed by the chance discovery of diplomatic relations that these rulers had established with Greeks. We have even more scant details about the life of Confucius, the founder of China's Confucianism, although the number of its adherents is still reported to be more than ten millions.

Semites have had hundreds of prophets; nevertheless, history knows hardly anything about most of them except their names. Only a few incidents about the lives of Noah, Abraham, Salih, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Zachariah and John are known to posterity. All the important links transmitting the details of their lives and doings are missing from the chain of history. How, then, the incomplete, disjointed accounts of the lives of these patriarchs can serve as beacons of guidance to humanity today? Barring the description of their morals and conduct given in the Qur'an all that is told about them in the Jewish Scriptures is held to be spurious by competent scholars. Even if we were to ignore these criticisms, only a dim and incomplete picture of these men of God emerges from the Jewish writings.

Torah<sup>2</sup> is the chief source of information about Moses, but if the experts and authors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* are to be believed, the Scripture extant today was written hundreds of years after the death of Moses. Some German scholars even claim to have discovered a two-fold tradition on which the Torah is based for it carries the inconsistencies of its original sources. The learned discourse on this issue can be seen in the article included under the heading "Bible" in the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia*<sup>3</sup>. If these criticisms of the scholars are deemed to be correct, as they are

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<sup>2</sup> Torah is the Hebrew word for "the Pentateuch".

<sup>3</sup> 11th Edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

generally accepted, what historical validity can be claimed for the records of other events prior to Moses?

Gospels are the records of the life of Jesus Christ. The Christian world, however, accepts only four of them and rejects others, like the Gospels of Thomas and Barnabas, as apocryphal. However, not one of the writers of these four, authentic 'Gospels' ever saw Jesus. Nothing is known about the sources on which these Gospels are based. Doubts have been raised whether the Gospels bearing the names of their authors were actually written by them. Even the time and language of the original Gospels are uncertain. Biblical scholars hold the view that the four extant Gospels were compiled from various sources from about 60 A.D. onwards. In regard to these dubious elements as well as the stories of birth and death of Jesus and the doctrine of Trinity, certain critics have expressed the view — as discussed recently by a famous Chicago Journal in its several issues — that the story of Christ is purely fictitious, adopted from Greek and Roman myths containing similar stories of birth, death and resurrection of some pagan gods. The researches into the origin of the Gospels show how puzzling and insufficient is the evidence to rediscover the Jesus of history.

That any human being should be set up as a perennial guide from man, it is most essential to have the entire life of that model before us. No incident, no part of the life of such a shining example should remain in the dark. Like an open book it should be known inside out so that humanity may be able to make out how far that life can serve as an ideal guide and teacher.

Viewed from this angle, none of the preachers and founders of the religions would stand the test of historicity except the Prophet of Islam. The uniqueness of Muhammad in this regard furnishes yet another testimony to the fact that he alone was sent down to this world as the seal of prophets. Only three of four of the founders of

religions, as earlier stated by us, can at best be put forth as historical characters, but not all of them can claim that everything about their life and character is known to the world. Buddhists form today about one-fourth of the world's population, but all that we know of the life of the Buddha consists of a mixture of fables and folk-lore. If we were to make a search for the missing links of his life, we would decidedly be unsuccessful in our quest. All that we can glean from the stories known about him is that a certain chieftain in the foothills of the Himalayas, south of Nepal, had a son who was endowed with a thoughtful disposition. After he had grown to manhood and become father of a child, he happened to see certain persons afflicted with misery. He was so shocked by the sufferings and decay manifest in all earthly things around him that he left his hearth and home to discover a higher and more enduring meaning in life and human destiny. He wandered all over the land — Varanasi, Patliputra and Rajgir<sup>4</sup> — sometimes he roamed in the cities, at others rambled over the mountains and forests, and ultimately reached Gaya<sup>5</sup>, where, sitting under a Bodhi-tree, he made the claim of having attained enlightenment. Thereafter, he went about expounding his discovery from Varanasi to Bihar and then left this fleeting world. This is, in fine, the sum total of our knowledge about the Buddha.

Zoroaster was also the founder of a faith. But nothing save surmises and conjectures about his life is the knowledge possessed by the world today. Rather than recounting the fictions about him we would better direct our attention to the resumé of findings by an expert given in the Encyclopaedia Britannica in an article bearing his name.

“The person of Zoroaster whom we meet with in these hymns (of

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<sup>4</sup> Famous historical places in North India. (IIPH)

<sup>5</sup> A city and District in Northern India.

Gâthâs) differs *to-to Coelo* from the Zoroaster of the younger Avesta. He is the exact opposite of the miraculous personage of a later legend.”<sup>6</sup>

After giving a description of Gâthâ, the writer continues: “Yet we must not expect too much from the Gâthâs in the way of definite details. They give no historical account of the life and teaching of their prophet, but rather are, so to say, *versus memorials*, which recapitulate the main points of interest, often again in brief outlines.”<sup>7</sup>

Again, as to the birth place of Zoroaster, the writer goes on to say: “As to his birth place, the testimonies are conflicting.”<sup>8</sup>

No consensus of opinion exists about the time of Zoroaster, which is hotly disputed by Greek historians as well as modern authorities.

The writer of the article reaches the conclusion that — “Agathies remarks (ii-24), with perfect truth, that it is no longer possible to determine with any certainty when he lived and legislated.”<sup>9</sup>

All we know about Zoroaster is that he was born somewhere in Azarbaijan<sup>10</sup>, preached his religion around Balkh<sup>11</sup>, converted King Vistaspa to his faith, worked certain miracles, married and had few children, and then died somewhere. Can anybody lay a claim that a person about whom our information is so limited and paltry is a well-known personality, fit to be put forth as a guiding star for humanity?

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<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th Edition), 1910-11 Vol. XXVII, p. 1042.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Famous place in Iran.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Moses is the most celebrated among the prophets of The Old Testament. Let us leave aside the question relating to the authenticity of Torah, as it exists at present, and assume that its five books contain a correct and dependable account of its author. But, what do they tell us? The life story of this great Prophet told by the Torah can be summed up in few sentences. Moses is brought up by an Egyptian princess in the palace of Pharaoh. After he comes of age, he helps the oppressed Bani Israel (Children of Israel) on one or two occasions and then he takes flight to Midian, where he marries and returns to Egypt again after a long period of exile. On his way back, mantle of prophet-hood fall upon him, he goes to the court of Pharaoh, works certain miracles and demands the emancipation of the enslaved Hebrews. He takes the advantage of a dark night to flee with his people from Egypt; Pharaoh leads the hordes of warriors and chariots thundering after Bani Israel; the sea gives way to Moses and his followers; but the watery walls surge back over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses takes his people to Arabia, and thence to Syria, fights the unbelieving folk living there and ultimately meets his death, on a hill, after he has grown quite old. Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, thus describes the journey's end of Moses in the concluding paragraphs.

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And we buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses *was* a hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated<sup>12</sup> and there arose not prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom LORD knew face to face.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Deut. 34:5-7.

<sup>13</sup> Deut. 34:10.

All the five books of Torah, the last of which is Deuteronomy, are believed to have been written by Moses himself. But, the few sentences cited above suggest, on the first glance, that the book of Deuteronomy, or at least its concluding portion, could have never been written by Moses. Nobody knows the name of Moses' biographer.

Similarly the words: 'no man knows his sepulchre unto this day' and 'there arose not a prophet since in Israel unto Moses' clearly indicate that the Book must have been written after a fairly long time when people had lost trace of such an important monument as the grave of their greatest benefactor, or, it could be that the whole nation had forgotten all about Moses in the glimmerings of a new redeemer expected by them.

"Moses *was* a hundred and twenty years old when he died," says the Deuteronomy, but how little do we know of the events of his long life? Only a few sketchy and disjointed events of Moses' life, like his birth, migration to Midian, marriage and early period of ministry and exodus have been related by his biographer. He is then seen taking part in a few battles but makes his exit to enter the scene again when he has grown quite old. Let us wean our thoughts from the ups and downs of Moses' life for every man has to undergo a chapter of accidents which are peculiar in each case, but we do need to know about the morals and conduct, demeanour and behaviour of a guide and leader of mankind. These very essential details of the life of Moses from the missing links of his story, however. Old Testament is replete with such trivialities as the ancestral lineage of its characters, population of the Hebrews at different periods and places and their rites and customs. Howsoever important these details may be for the study of the Holy Land's geography and chronology, genealogy and sociology, but they are hardly of any practical utility for compilation of the biography of a religious guide like Moses. This

deficiency makes the characterisation of Moses incomplete.

The apostle of God nearest in time to the Prophet of Islam was Jesus Christ whose followers today outnumber the votaries of every other religion. Strange though it may seem, but it is a hard fact that the particulars of the life of this Prophet available today are the most meagre in comparison to the founders of all other religions. The keen interest taken by the Christendom in the study of ancient civilisations, archaeological excavations and deciphering of ancient writings has shed a floor-light on the distant past of Babylon, Assyria, Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, India and Turkistan and succeeded in rewriting not a few lost pages of the ancient history; yet, if it has failed anywhere to recover the missing pieces of the eternal landscape of the past, it is the sealed book of its own saviour's life story. Earnest Renan left no stone unturned to recreate the *Vie do Jesus*<sup>14</sup> but, as everybody knows, his effort proved fruitless. The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ died at the age of thirty-three but it records the events of the last three years of his life only<sup>15</sup>. Even this is either not supported by sufficient evidence or has been proved to be dubious by good evidence to the contrary. The only information we have about the historical Jesus is that he was brought to Egypt after his birth, worked a few miracles during his childhood; but then

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<sup>14</sup> Published in 1863.

<sup>15</sup> In 1906, Albert Schweitzer, a philosopher and theologian, published his monumental work, entitled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* in which he surveyed the whole enterprise from the earliest time to his day. This is how he began his final chapter: "There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the life of Jesus." Another Scholar, Rev. Dr. Charles Anderson Scot, says in his article on Jesus Christ written for the 14th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "The attempt to write a 'Life of Jesus' should frankly be abandoned. The material for it certainly does not exist. It has been calculated that the total number of days of his life, regarding which we have any record does not exceed 50." (vol. XIII, Pp. 16/17)

he quits the scene to reappear at the age of thirty, baptising and preaching the Gospel to fishermen in the mountains beside the sea of Galilee. He gathers a handful of followers, has a few discussions about the Law with the priests and elders, is got arrested by the Jews and produced before Pontius Pilate, is ultimately crucified and his sepulchre is found vacant on the third day. Nobody knows where Jesus remained or what he did during the twenty-five years of his life's duration. And, of the happenings narrated about his last three years, what else is there except a few parables, miracles and crucifixion?

A biography to be ideal must also be comprehensive. In other words, whatever lights and guidance people need in different walks of life — for fulfilment of their duties, redeeming the pledges, being fair and just and virtuous should be had from the life of the ideal personage. Viewed from this angle, one would have to concede that only the life of the Prophet of Islam conforms to this standard. What is religion, after all? It is nothing save a means to unfold the relationship, on the one hand between man and his Master, and, on the other, between man and man. Religion is, thus, means to teach us the obligations we owe to God and our rights and duties with reference to our fellow beings; and, hence, it becomes a bounden duty of the follower of every religion to find out what light the life of his prophet or founder of religion sheds on these questions. From this standpoint, however, one would not find complete guidance anywhere save in the life of Muhammad, the last Prophet of God.

Religions are of two kinds. One, the religions like Buddhism and Jainism which are agnostic, denying the existence of God. It would, therefore be futile to look for the awareness of God's nature and attributes or the tender regard and adoration for God and His Omnipotence and Unicity in the life of the precursors of these religions. The others are theistic faiths which acknowledge the

existence of the Supreme being in one form or the other, but the lives of their founders breathe little of their devotion to God. The Portraits of their lives do not pretend to be shadows of divine perfection, nor do they tell us explicitly about their quest for God or their beliefs and convictions. Go through the Old Testament and you would find quite a few references to the Oneness of God, His commandments and the rules for offering oblations unto God, but hardly a sentence describing the feeling of awe and gratitude to God, spiritual exaltation and a living awareness of the Supreme Being experienced by Moses, had the religion of Moses been the last and abiding principle of divine guidance, its followers must have preserved the aids to spiritual elevation; but they failed to do so, perhaps, as designed by Providence.

Gospels are the mirrors of Christ's life. They tell us that God is the Father of Jesus, but what obligations the son owed to his Father and how he answered this call of duty? The son declares the great love of the Father for him, but how much did the son love his heavenly Father? How he obeyed his commands, how he paid Him divine honours, how he bowed and humbled himself to show his reverence, and whether he asked the Father to grant him anything else save the day's bread? We do not know whether Jesus spent his nights in prayers and vigils except the one before his betrayal and arrest. What spiritual enlightenment and inspiration can we draw from a prophet like him? Had the Gospelists clearly portrayed the picture of communion between Jesus Christ and God instead of spinning myths around him, the first Christian Emperor would not have had to convene the Nicene Council, after 325 years of the birth of Christ, to draw up a statement of Christian creed which remains an inexplicable riddle to this day.

Turning to the rights and duties of human beings, we again fail to find any clear exposition of this important matter in the life of any

prophet or founder of religion except the life of Muhammad. Gautama Buddha left his home and family, severing all connections from his loving wife and innocent son, to discover the meaning of human destiny in the solitude of the woods. He said good-bye to his friends and abandoned the responsibility of administration in order to find the peace of *Nirvâna* by overcoming the desire arising out of his will-to-live. Now, one can ask what message does the teaching of Buddha contain for the common man, for the rulers and the ruled, for the rich and the poor, for the master and the servant; and how does it provide guidance in the discharge of one's obligations as a father, as a son, or as a brother, sister or friend? Are the teachings of Buddha comprehensive enough to be followed by the ascetics and businessmen alike? His teachings were, in point of fact, never acted upon by the working classes, else the administration in the countries like China, Japan, Siam, Tibet and Burma would have long gone to winds; trade, industry and business would have come to a standstill; and the populous cities would have turned into woodlands.

Moses was an illustrious leader of men; noted for commanding the Hebrew hordes in the battlefields. He could thus be a model in the case of a call to arms, but has he left any precedent to be followed in the discharge of one's rights and duties and fulfilment of one's obligations to others? How he wanted the wife and the husband, the father and the son, brothers and friends to behave towards one another; what his custom was in making peace with his adversaries; how he spent his wealth for the benefit of sick and the poor, the orphan and the way-farers?

Moses was married, had children as well as a brother, relatives and friends and, we believe, as an Apostle of God. His behaviour towards them would have been exemplary. But, we are at a loss to find any guidance in these matters from the books of Scripture attributed to him!

Jesus Christ had his mother and, as the Bible tells us, he had brothers and sisters and even his earthly father, although he was born of a virgin mother. Nevertheless, the story of his life told in the Gospels keeps mum about his behaviour towards his kith and kin. Social relationship has been, and shall ever remain, the pivot of civilised existence, and hence every religion must seek to regulate it. But, what is there in the life of Jesus Christ to offer guidance in these matters? He belonged to a subject race ruled by an alien power. How could he, then, set any example for the rulers and administrators? He did not marry, and hence his life has nothing to guide the spouses whose relationship of love and affection has been spoken of in the very first chapter of the Old Testament. Furthermore, since an overwhelming portion of world's population leads a married life, Jesus' life would come amiss to offer any guidance to them. Verily, Jesus can never be the ideal guide of humanity for he ever remained indifferent to his relatives, had nothing to do with earning and spending, war and peace and friends and foes. These very mundane affairs, unfortunately, form the hub of our earthly life. Were this world to follow the example of Jesus, all progress will be suspended and the silence of the grave would descend over the world. Christian Europe would, then, die a natural death.

Yet another determinant of an ideal life is its practicality — a decisive test for a founder of religion or law-giver; since, the preacher of a canon and system of belief should be able to lead the way by his personal example of living up to his precepts. His actions, in other words, should demonstrate the feasibility of his teachings.

Anybody can enunciate any number of fanciful notions, attractive concepts and appealing philosophies, but not everyone can live up to them. Innocent and fine maxims are no proof of one's virtuous character: it rather consists of following the narrow, straight path of unblemished rectitude. Were it not so, it would be difficult to

distinguish between vice and virtue, good and bad and the world would then abound in agreeable chatterers. Now, let us judge the founders of religions by this acid test.

“But I say unto you which hear”, said Jesus Christ, “Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to *take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus also taught that one should forgive one’s brother’s misdemeanour not only seven times but “seventy times seven”<sup>17</sup> and that “a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>18</sup> Many more glamorous sayings of Jesus and other sermonizers can be cited here but none can be treated as a wholesome moral precept unless it is also accompanied by a practical example of the preacher. These would be merely sparkling gifts of the gab rather than examples of practical conduct. How can one forgive his enemies unless he has first subdued them? What does charity, benevolence and philanthropy of a man mean, if he is not blessed with anything to spare? Just as the man who has not married and has no children and relations cannot be held forth as an ideal husband, or a loving father, or a gracious kinsman; how can one be taken as a model of mercy, kindness and forgiveness if one had never had an opportunity to pardon anybody?

Virtues are of two kinds: one is positive and the other negative. Living like an anchorite in a far off cave can, at the most, be reckoned as a negative virtue for the ascetics merely abstain from doing harm

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 6:27-30.

<sup>17</sup> Mt. 18:22.

<sup>18</sup> Mt. 19:23.

to others. But, what about the positive side of their actions? Do they help the poor, feed the hungry, raise the fallen or guide the erring? Forgiveness, charity, philanthropy, hospitality, truthfulness, kindness, zeal to restore truth and justice and fulfilment of one's obligations are some of the cardinal virtues requiring positive action. Virtues are, of a fact, more often positive than negative.

It would now be clear that there could be no "ideal life" — to be followed by others — unless its positive and practical aspect is also before us. How can we follow the example of any guide, if it is not illustrated? We want precedents for waging war and making peace, for leading our lives in affluence and poverty, for living as married couples and celibates, for our communion with God and social relationship with our fellow beings. In victory and defeat, in anger and forbearance, in loneliness and companionship, in short, in every situation of life marked by vicissitudes of our earthly existence we need an exemplar to show us the right path. We require practical examples of those who have successfully met these situations and hit upon a solution rather than those who have nothing to offer except sweet words. It is neither the poet's fancy nor the flower of speech, but an indisputable fact of history that no other life save that of Muhammad, the last Prophet of God, answers the test of practicality.

To recapitulate the essential ingredients of an ideal life, discussed afore, let me repeat that historicity, comprehensiveness, perfection and practicality are necessary for any character to be followed by others. I do not mean to say that other prophets lacked these qualities, but I do assert that the records of their lives and doings preserved by their followers and handed down to us throw no light on these aspects of their character. This was in conformity with the will of God, perhaps, as it constitutes, in itself, an intrinsic evidence that the prophets of yore were sent to their own peoples and for their own times. Their biographies were not preserved because

posterity did not need them. It was only Muhammad, the last of the prophets, who was sent by God for all the nations, as a shining example, to be followed by the entire humanity until the Day of Judgement. His biography, the record of his sayings and doings, had thus to be perdurable and ever-blooming, and this is the greatest testimony, a practical attestation of the finality of Muhammad's prophethood.

«Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of Prophets; and Allah is Aware of all things.» (Qur'an 33: 40)

Another scholar, Rev. Dr. Charles Anderson Scot says in his article on Jesus Christ written for the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

“The attempt to write a ‘Life of Jesus’ should frankly be abandoned. The material for it certainly does not exist. It has been calculated that the total number of days of his life regarding which we have any record does not exceed 50.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. XIII, Pp. 16/17.



# Three

## HISTORICITY

Let us now have a closer look at the biography of the Prophet of Islam to see how far it answers the fourfold criteria earlier enunciated by me. The first of these is historicity.

The way Islam has safely preserved not only the life story of its Prophet, but also everything even remotely connected with him, is simply a marvel of Islam. The people who have handed down, collected and codified the sayings and doings and other incidents of the life of the holy Prophet are known as narrators, traditionists and biographers; among these we find the companions of the Prophet, their sons and successors — scholars belonging to the period up to the fourth century of Islamic era. After all this material had been committed to writing, the biographical details of the narrators, that is, the antecedents and the characters of the people in any way connected with the transmission of the “narrations” relating to the Prophet were also put into writing. All this encyclopaedic compilation of about a hundred thousand biographical sketches is known as *Asmâ'-ur-Rijâl*. Dr. A. Springer, the celebrated German scholar, who was closely associated with the educational and literary activities of the Bengal Asiatic Society till 1854, and who published the *Maghâzi* of Wâqidi as edited by Von Kremer in 1856, also brought out the *al-Iṣâbah fee Tameez aṣ-Ṣaḥâbah*, a collection of the biographies of the Prophet's Companions by Hâfidh ibn Ḥajar. As Dr.

A. Sprenger claims that he was the first European to have written the *Life of Muhammad*<sup>20</sup> drawing his material from the original Arabic sources. Although Dr. A. Sprenger has written the Prophet's biography spitefully with a malicious glance, he had to acknowledge in his introduction to the *Iṣābah* the unsurpassable feat of Muslim historiography in these words.

“The glory of the literature of the Mohammedans is its literary biography. There is no nation, nor there has been any which like them has during twelve centuries recorded the life of every man of letters. If the biographical records of the Mohammedans were collected, we should probably have accounts of the lives of half a million of distinguished persons, and it would be found that there is not a decennium of their history, nor a place of importance which has not its representatives.”<sup>21</sup>

The Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him) had performed his last Ḥajj known as the Farewell Pilgrimage with more than hundred thousand companions who are called *Ṣaḥābah*. History records the lives of about eleven thousand of these Companions who have transmitted some saying or an act of the Prophet to others. Their narration of the hadiths or the traditions of the Prophet of Islam has made them a part of recorded history.

The holy Prophet departed from this world in 11 A.H./ 632 A.D. while the elderly Companions remained alive up to 40 A.H./ 660 A.D., although the juniors among them were then still quite numerous. It is reported that by the close of the first century after Hijrah nearly all of them had breathed their last. We give here the names of the Companions who were the last to close their eyes in different parts of the Islamic realm.

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<sup>20</sup> Published in Alahabad in 1951.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Iṣābah*, I, p. 1.

Name	Place	Year of death (A.H./A.D.)
1. Abu Umâmah Bâhili	Syria	86/705
2. ‘Abdullâh ibn Hârith ibn Jazr	Egypt	86/705
3. ‘Abdullâh ibn Abu ‘Awfâ	Koofah	87/705
4. Sâ'yib ibn Yazeed	Madeenah	91/709
5. Anas ibn Mâlik	Başrah	93/711

Anas ibn Mâlik, who was the last Companion to receive the summons of death, was the personal servant of the Prophet and had served him for ten years at Madeenah.

The era of the Companion's Successors, who are known as *Tâbi'een*, actually begins from the time of the Prophet's migration to Madeenah. They were the persons who had seen and conversed with some Companion of the Prophet but not with the Prophet (bpuh) himself. Many of them had already been born when the Prophet was alive, but either being too young or being away from Madeenah, they had not shared the company of the Prophet. To name only a few, ‘Abdur-Rahmân ibn Hârith was born in 3/624, Qays ibn Abi Hâzim in 4/625 and Sa‘eed ibn Muş‘ab 5/626. Several others like them are regarded as Companion's disciples. They had dispersed with the widening of Islamic frontiers, and taken up residence in far-flung areas, teaching and preaching the tenets of Islam and the practice of the Prophet learnt from their elders. Their number was fairly large, for, in Madeenah alone there were 139 of them who had taken lessons at the feet of elder Companions of the Prophet. Besides these, Madeenah had 129 more who had learnt the Prophet's traditions from

several Companions, although their teachers were not reckoned among the elders, while another 87 had picked up information about the Prophet from one or two of his companions only. There were, thus, 355 of them in Madeenah alone as reported by Ibn Sa‘d. The number of the Companions’ disciples only in one city is sufficient to indicate their vast numbers spread over in Makkah, Ṭā’if, Baṣrah, Koofah, Damascus, Yemen and Egypt.<sup>22</sup> These were the persons who had devoted themselves to the preaching and disseminating the modes and manners of the Prophet. Now, if we assume that every Companion had narrated at least a few sayings and doings of the Prophet to his disciples, which were all codified later on, what a large number of these narratives would have come to be recorded by then! However, the number of traditions transmitted by some of the Prophet’s Companions, given here, would give a more exact idea of the great number of such reports.

Name of Companion	Number of Sayings
1. Abu Hurayrah (d. 59/678)	5374
2. ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Abbâs (d. 68/687)	2660
3. ‘Â’ishah (d. 58/677)	2220
4. ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73/692)	1630
5. Jâbir ibn ‘Abdullâh (78/697)	1560

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<sup>22</sup> The number of *Tâbi’een* in Makkah, Koofah and Baṣrah, as given by Ibn Sa‘d was 131, 413 and 164 respectively. The last *tâbi’ee* was Khalaf ibn Khaleefah who died in 181A.H./797 A.D. He was a disciple of ‘Âmir ibn Wâ’ilah, a Companion of the Prophet.

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| 6. Anas ibn Mâlik (d. 93/711)          | 1286 |
| 7. Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri<br>(d. 74/693) | 1170 |

The traditions narrated by these masters, who were all close Companions of the Prophet, form the chief source of the Prophet's biography. The years in which they died, point out the fact that they lived long enough after the demise of the holy Prophet to impart the knowledge possessed by them to a large number of persons. Those were the days when the knowledge of Prophetic traditions was the only branch of learning enjoying recognition and patronage of the society, and warranted an honoured place in religious as well as worldly circles. Thousands of the Prophet's Companions were thus acting on the dictum of their beloved Master who had ordained: "Disseminate whatever you hear from me," and "inform those not present whatever you hear or see of me." They considered it a great purpose of their lives to educate their sons and successors, friends and acquaintances about the teachings of the Prophet. By the time this generation breathed its last, the keen desire and solicitude awakened by them brought up a new generation of enthusiastic learners and scholars, moved by an unbounded zeal to safeguard the precious treasure bequeathed to them by their precursors. The method of instruction in those days required that the students had to memorise every word of what they were taught and then to repeat it before being allowed to teach others. The Prophet (bpuh) had, while insisting on the propagation of his words and deeds, also warned them that, he, who wilfully distorted his teachings or spread any false report about him would be doomed to perdition. The result was that sometimes even eminent Companions and erudite scholars were seen trembling all over to the fibre of their being while narrating any tradition, lest they should commit a mistake and earn eternal wrath of

the Lord. ‘Abdullâh ibn Mas‘ood was so very careful that once when he narrated something about the Prophet, his face turned pale as death and then he hastily added: “The Prophet had spoken it thus or something like this.”<sup>23</sup>

Strong memory was the nature’s gift to the Arabs who normally used to fix in their mind hundred of verses eulogizing their tribes and forefathers and even the horses of good breed. Like every other human faculty, retentive memory is also strengthened by constant practice. The Prophet’s Companions and their Successors, who were always eager to store in their minds the smallest detail pertaining to the Prophet, had developed this faculty to unbelievable perfection. They used to learn by heart every act and incident, words and deeds of the Prophet with the same care and scrupulousness as the Muslims still memories the Qur’an. Every traditionist could repeat, word for word, tens of thousands of traditions: and though he often committed them to writing, he could not expect to command the respect of others unless he could also reproduce them from his memory. Since consultation of one’s writings was taken as an evidence of forgetfulness and was a discredit to a scholar, one normally kept such annotations for private use only.

Some orientalists, particularly Sir Willium Muir and Ignaz Goldziher, have raked together all possible doubts about the accuracy of the traditions, particularly in regard to their codification and compilation, which, they assert, were taken in hand ninety years after the death of the Prophet. I have explained here in some detail what meticulous and painstaking efforts were made by the Companions of the Prophet, from the very first day, to ensure the accuracy of the

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<sup>23</sup> This is the reason for use of the phrase, ‘God knows best’, by the traditionists and Muslim writers, which is misunderstood by most of the orientalists as an indication of doubt and uncertainty. It speaks volumes of their understanding of Islam.

traditions. Their trustworthiness, solicitude and carefulness are, of a fact, sufficient to set at rest all the doubts in this regard.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, there were reasons, as I would presently tell you, for the diffidence of the Companions to put the traditions into writing, at least, in the earlier stages.

The first reason was that in the initial stages the Prophet had forbidden to write anything save the sacred Scripture. The Prophet is related to have instructed his Companions: "Do not write from me anything except the Qur'an."<sup>25</sup> This command was meant for the commonalty in order to guard against the mixing up of the revelations with the traditions. But when the revelation was fairly completed and the people had learnt to distinguish between the two, the Prophet permitted the Companions to take down what they heard from him.<sup>26</sup> There were, however, Companions who ever remained overcautious and refrained from writing anything of the traditions for the fear of committing a mistake and thus incurring the displeasure of the Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him).

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<sup>24</sup> The doubts raised in recent years in regard to the authenticity of the hadiths by an influential school, of western scholars constitutes, as Sayyid Husayn Naşr says, the most "vicious and insidious attack on Islam." The narrators of hadiths feared God in a way which most modern men can hardly imagine and it is psychologically absurd that, with a mentality to which the alternative of Heaven or Hell is the most real thing of all, they should commit the unpardonable sin of forging prophetic sayings. Nothing is less scientific than to project the modern mentality, which is an anomaly in history, on to a period when man lived and thought in a traditional world in which the verities of religion determined life itself, and in which man sought first and foremost to perform the most important duty placed upon their shoulders namely, to save their souls." (*Ideals and Realities of Islam*, p. 81)

<sup>25</sup> *Taqyeed*, Pp. 29-35.

<sup>26</sup> *Aṭ-Ṭabaqât*, II, I, p. 125; IV, I, p. 189; *al-Musnad*, II, Pp. 162, 192, 207, 215.

Another reason, as referred to earlier, was the diffidence of the Arabs to write anything that ought to be memorised. Some of the Companions held the view that once the narratives relating to the Prophet were put into writing, the people would give up the practice of learning them by heart. In their view, writing of anything made the people indolent, for, once a written record came into existence, people developed the habit of consulting it when need arose. The fear was not entirely unfounded, since, we see that as the annotations of traditions grew in number, scholars gradually gave up the practice of enshrining them in their memory. Later on, it did not remain a bar to the scholarship to rely entirely on written records.

The third reason was that the Arabs disliked to write anything and then get it to their heart by rote. To them, it was an evidence of short memory and, for that reason, if anybody ever took down something, he tried to hide it from others.

The earlier scholars were of the opinion that anything inscribed in the hearts of the people was much safer and more lasting than what was penned on paper. A written record was, in their view always open to interpolation and destruction while something dwelling in the people's memory was beyond the reach of every intrusion.

For all that, it is a canard to assert that the reports about the Prophet's teachings, life and conduct were transmitted only by word of mouth for the first ninety or hundred years, as assumed by the orientalist. The reason for this erroneous assumption is that the *Muwatta'*, of Mâlik ibn Anas and the *al-Maghâzi* of Ibn Ishâq are generally taken as the first compilations on the Prophet's biography. Both these writers were contemporaries who died in 179/795 and 151/768 respectively, and hence these sciences were wrongly dated as origination in the second century after Hijrah. The facts are, however, otherwise, since there is ample evidence to prove that the compilation of these materials had started much earlier.

Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez, who died in the year 101/719, was himself a noted scholar and had been the governor of Madeenah before his nomination as Caliph in 99/717. Immediately after assuming the caliphate, he sent an edict to al-Qâḍi Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Amr ibn ‘Āzim al-Anṣārī (d. 117/735) saying: “Start compiling the traditions of the Prophet, for I fear that these will be lost gradually.”<sup>27</sup> The command<sup>28</sup> of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez, mentioned in the *Ṭabaqât* of Bukhari, *Muwatta’a* of Mâlik and *Musnad* of ad-Dârimi, was executed by Qâḍi Abu Bakr who compiled all the available reports and submitted them to the Caliph. Copies of this compilation were sent to all the provincial capitals of the Islamic empire.<sup>29</sup> Qâḍi Abu Bakr was especially selected for the job since he was then Qâḍi at Madeenah. An additional reason for his selection was that his mother’s sister, ‘Amrah, was the chief disciple of ‘Ā’ishah, the wife of the Prophet (bpuh) and the mother of believers, and thus, whatever the former had learnt from her venerable mentor had already been committed into writing by Qâḍi Abu Bakr. Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez had accordingly asked him to pay particular attention to codify the traditions transmitted by ‘Ā’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

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<sup>27</sup> Ad-Dârimi, I, p. 126; *aṭ-Ṭabaqât al-Kabeer*, VIII, p. 353; *aṣ-Ṣagheer*, p. 105.

<sup>28</sup> Orientalists like Guillaume, Ruth, Goldziher and Schacht have expressed doubts about the trustworthiness of his report, but they have failed to take notice of the fact that “Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez had directed not only Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Ḥâzim but also az-Zuhri (*Bukhari aṣ-Ṣagheer*, p. 105) and others (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, I, p. 204) to collect the traditions. In fact, az-Zuhri agreed to allow making copies of his own compilation by his students on the persuasion of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez. A lengthy quotation from the work of az-Zuhri, compiled and sent to other centres under the orders of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez, is preserved by Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qâsim ibn Sallâm.” (*Amwâl*, p. 578-581).

<sup>29</sup> *Bayân al-‘Ilm*, p. 38; *Ajjâj*, p. 494.

There is, in fact, sufficient evidence to show that several reports of the commands and utterances, events and incidents relating to the Prophet (bpuh) had been compiled even during his lifetime. On the occasion of the peaceful occupation of Makkah, the holy Prophet had delivered a sermon. Bukhari and several other traditionists report that on the request of Abu Shah, a Companion hailing from Yemen, the Prophet had caused the sermon to be transcribed for him.<sup>30</sup> The Prophet of Islam had also sent letters to several emperors and rulers of countries around Arabia inviting them to embrace Islam.<sup>31</sup> A few years back, the letter addressed by the Prophet to Muquayqis of Egypt was discovered within the hard cover of a book preserved in a local monastery. The photostatic copy of the letter, since published, confirms the content of reports transmitted by the early scholars of traditions, word for word, leaving no doubt about its authenticity<sup>32</sup>. What else can one demand for the authenticity and trustworthiness of the traditionists? Abu Hurayrah is once reported to have claimed that nobody except ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Âṣ possessed a larger collection of the traditions than he had, but it was because the latter

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<sup>30</sup> *aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥ*, *Kitâb-al-‘Ilm*, III p. 49; *Sunan*, 24, 3 (*Kitâb-al-‘Ilm*, 4-5), *al-Jâmi‘*, 12, 2 (*Kitâb al-‘Ilm*).

<sup>31</sup> The Prophet (bpuh) had sent a number of letters to different rulers. The original letter of the Prophet (bpuh) to Heraclius was in Spain for long centuries; it has reappeared now but remains to be studied scientifically. The original letter to Muquayqis of Egypt is preserved, and is now in the Topkapi Museum at Istanbul. The Negus of Abyssinia was also recipient of several letters from the Prophet, one of which exists at Damascus. Half a dozen or more letters of the Prophet’s correspondence with Mundhir ibn Sawa, the ruler of Bahrain, have been recorded in history, including one whose original has come down to us. It was first published in Berlin (*Muhammad Rasoolullah*, Pp. 97-105).

<sup>32</sup> C.f. for Photos and discussion see Dr. Muhammad Ḥameedullah’s *Le Prophete De L’Islam*, Pp. 205-7, 212-16, 234-37. Also see *Islamic Culture*, October, 1939, Pp. 427-39.

took down what he heard from the Prophet while Abu Hurayrah did not do so<sup>33</sup>. Another tradition preserved in *as-Sunan Abu Dawood* and *Musnad Ibn Hanbal* says that ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr had, on one occasion, discounted reducing the traditions into writing. It is related that an objection was raised that it was improper to take down everything for the Prophet was, at times, in different frames of mind, happy or angry, and some of the remarks might not be actually meant for guidance of the people not present on the occasion. Later on, ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr raised the matter with the Prophet, who, pointing to his lips, replied, “You can write. Whatever comes out of them is just and right.”<sup>34</sup> ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr once remarked that of two things for which he wanted God to grant him life, one was the *Ŝâdiqah* in which he had written down whatever he had heard from the Prophet in his own words.<sup>35</sup> On another occasion, when Mujâhid enquired from ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr about *Ŝâdiqah*, the latter replied, “This is *Ŝâdiqah* in which I have written down the Prophet’s words as I heard them from him. Nobody intervenes in it between me and the Prophet.”<sup>36</sup>

Bukhari records a tradition that a few months after migration to Madeenah, the Prophet had ordered to take a census of the Muslims. The names thus recorded numbered one thousand five hundred.<sup>37</sup> Rules and tariffs of the zakah, covering two pages were got written by the Prophet for being sent to Qâdis and tax collectors appointed by him. Copies of this document were preserved, for a

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<sup>33</sup> *Aş-Şaḥeeḥ, Kitâb al-‘Ilm*. ‘Amr ibn al-‘Âş named his book *aş-Şaḥeeḥ* *aş-Ŝâdiqah* which he wrote after obtaining the permission of the Prophet (bpuh) to record events and traditions from him. (*Hadeeth Literature*, Pp. 43-44)

<sup>34</sup> *As-Sunan*, II, p, 77; *aş-Şaḥeeḥ, Kitâb al-‘Ilm*, p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Ad-Dârimi, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> *As-Sunan*, II, ii, Pp. 125, 202.

<sup>37</sup> *Aş-Şaḥeeḥ, Kitâb al-Jihâd*.

long time, by Abu Bakr, descendants of ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm and several other persons.<sup>38</sup> Caliph ‘Ali also possessed certain written documents containing traditions of the Prophet bearing on the Shari‘ah rules, which he used to keep in his scabbard and has shown to several persons.<sup>39</sup> Another written document was the treaty of Hudaybiyah, drawn up in 6/628. It was committed into writing by ‘Ali ibn Abi Tâlib at the instance of the Prophet who had kept a copy of it and made over another to the Quraysh of Makkah.<sup>40</sup> The instructions in regard to obligatory prayers, charity, blood-money, etc. were sent by the Prophet to ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm, the governor of Yemen.<sup>41</sup> Another letter containing instructions about dead animals was sent by the Prophet to ‘Abdullâh ibn al-Ḥakeem.<sup>42</sup> The Prophet also gave written instructions in regard to prayers, fasting, usury, drinking, etc. to a Companion, Wâ’il ibn Ḥajr, when the latter departed for his home town in Ḥaḍrmaut.<sup>43</sup> Once Caliph ‘Umar had an occasion to enquire from the people about the Prophet’s practice in regard to blood money payable to the widows of the deceased. Aḍ-Ḍaḥḥâk ibn Sufiyân answered the question on the basis of a document which had been sent to his tribe by the Prophet.<sup>44</sup>

Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez sent an emissary to Madeenah, to obtain the document about rules of zakah. It was found with the successors of ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm.<sup>45</sup> The letters sent by the Prophet to Yemen contained instructions about recitation of the

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<sup>38</sup> Ad-Dâraqutni, *Kitâb az-Zakâh*, p. 209.

<sup>39</sup> *Aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥ*, II, Pp. 1020, 1084.

<sup>40</sup> *Ṭabaqât*, *Kitâb al-Maghâzi*, p. 71; *aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥ*, p. 64, 45; *Ibn Hishâm*, p. 747.

<sup>41</sup> *Kanz al-‘Ummah*, III, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup> *Aṣ-Ṣagheer*, p. 217.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 242.

<sup>44</sup> Ad-Dâraqutni, p. 485.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 451.

Qur'an, emancipation of slaves and divorce.<sup>46</sup> When Mu'âdh was deputed by the Prophet to Yemen for religious instruction of the people there, he enquired in a letter whether zakah was payable on vegetables grown by the cultivators. The reply sent by the Prophet forbade him to levy the tax in that case.<sup>47</sup>

When Marwân once said, during the course of his sermon that Makkah was sanctuary, Râfi' ibn Khadeej immediately corrected him by declaring that Madeenah also enjoyed the same privilege for he had a written document of the Prophet to that effect with him.<sup>48</sup> Ḍaḥḥâk ibn Qays had, on one occasion, enquired from another Companion, an-Nu'mân ibn Basheer, about the *Soorah* of the Qur'an normally recited by the Prophet (bpuh) in Friday prayers. The letter sent in reply by the latter said that the Prophet recited the chapter of *Hal Atâka* in these prayers.<sup>49</sup> Caliph 'Umar sent a written instruction to 'Utba ibn Farqad saying that the Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him) had forbidden the use of silk.<sup>50</sup>

These are some of the written directions sent by the Prophet or his immediate successors, from time to time, to the governors, *Qâdis*, tax-collectors and others. Evidence is also not lacking to show that some of the prominent companions had desired and actually compiled a set of such instructions. Caliph Abu Bakr had also made a collection but on reconsideration he destroyed the same.<sup>51</sup> 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb, the second Caliph, intended to make arrangements for the compilation of the Prophet's traditions. Although he was aware of the

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<sup>46</sup> Ad-Dârimi, p. 293.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 45

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Musnad*, IV, p. 141.

<sup>49</sup> Muslim, II, p. 323.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 307.

<sup>51</sup> *Tadhkirât al-Ḥuffâdh*, I. p. 5.

fact that his son, ‘Abdullâh, had made such a collection with the permission of the Prophet, which was very often consulted by others, he finally gave up the idea lest it should be construed as an innovation.<sup>52</sup> Historians record the existence of a collection of juristic opinions pronounced by Caliph ‘Ali which was later on presented to Ibn ‘Abbâs.<sup>53</sup> The traditions compiled by ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Abbâs were copied out by certain persons belonging to Tâ’if. They also showed it to him for correction and confirmation of the text.<sup>54</sup> Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr is also reported to have made a copy of the collection of ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Abbâs.<sup>55</sup> A reference has been made of the *Sâdiqah* of ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-Âṣ. It is possible to trace this work in the hadiths narrated by ‘Amr ibn Shu‘ayb as he utilized his grandfather ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr’s books.<sup>56</sup> He was criticised by the scholars since he used to read it out instead of being able to rehearse the same from memory.<sup>57</sup> Jâbir ibn ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr was a Madeenian disciple of the Prophet. Jâbir’s disciple Wahâb ibn Munabbih had compiled a *Ṣaḥeefah* (journal — a note book) under his teacher’s guidance which was later on transmitted to several scholars,<sup>58</sup> one of whom was Ismâ‘eel ibn ‘Abdul-Kareem. Another collection of Jâbir ibn ‘Abdullâh’s traditions was compiled by Sulaymân ibn ‘Abdullâh ibn Qays al-Yashkuri who had three disciples, Abu az-Zubayr, Abu Sufiyân and Shu‘waybi, all of whom rose as eminent scholars in the generation succeeding the Companions.<sup>59</sup> Sulaymân ibn Samurah inherited a large collection of

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<sup>52</sup> *Al-Jâmi‘*, p. 586.

<sup>53</sup> Muslim, Introd.

<sup>54</sup> *Al-Jâmi‘*, *Kitâb al-‘Ilal*, p. 691.

<sup>55</sup> Ad-Dârimi, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> *Al-Jâmi‘*, I, p. 43.

<sup>57</sup> *At-Tahdheeb*, VIII, p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> *Al-‘Ilal*, I, p. 318; *at-Tahdheeb*, II, p. 215.

<sup>59</sup> *At-Tahdheeb*, I, p. 316.

traditions from his father, Samurah ibn Jundab, who was a Companion of the Prophet.<sup>60</sup> This was later on transmitted to others by Sulaymân's son, Ḥabeeb.<sup>61</sup> Abu Hurayrah is credited with the transmission of largest number of traditions among the Prophet's Companions. One of his disciples, Hammam ibn Munabbih compiled a collection of traditions learnt from his teacher, which was known as *Ṣaḥifah Hammam* and was incorporated in the second volume of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad* (from pages 312 to 318).<sup>62</sup> Basheer ibn Nahik was another pupil of Abu Hurayrah who had made a collection of his traditions and even got it confirmed by Abu Hurayrah before transmitting it to others.<sup>63</sup> Abu Hurayrah once showed this collection to some one, who reported that the compilation was not in the handwriting of Abu Hurayrah.<sup>64</sup>

Anas ibn Mâlik, who served the Prophet throughout his life, has narrated a large number of traditions. He used to advise his sons to take down the hadiths narrated by him.<sup>65</sup> A lady named Salama relates that she had seen 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs taking down the traditions from Abu Râfi', a servant of the Prophet.<sup>66</sup> Wâqidi is one of the earliest biographers of the Prophet. He says that he had seen the letter sent by the Prophet to Mundhir ibn Sâwâ, the Chief of

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<sup>60</sup> *At-Tahdheeb*, VI, p. 211.

<sup>61</sup> *At-Tahdheeb*, IV p. 198. A part of this work is still preserved in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* of at-Ṭabarâni.

<sup>62</sup> Two manuscripts of this *Ṣaḥeefah*, a Berlin MSS and a Damascus MSS have since been discovered and published with an English rendering by Dr. M. Hameedullah under the auspices of Centre Cultural Islamique, Paris. Recent researches have shown that out of 138 narrations in *Ṣaḥeefat Hammam*, as many as 98 were drawn by Bukhari and Muslim.

<sup>63</sup> *Al-'Ilah*, p. 691; ad-Dârimi, p. 68.

<sup>64</sup> *Fath al-Bâri*, I, Pp. 184-185.

<sup>65</sup> Ad-Dârimi, p. 68; *Taqyeed*, p. 96.

<sup>66</sup> *At-Ṭabaqât*, II, ii, p. 123.

Bahrain, in a heap of books of Ibn ‘Abbâs.<sup>67</sup> The historian at-Ṭabari has on record that a detailed account of the battle of Badr was written by ‘Urwâh ibn Zubayr for Caliph ‘Abdul-Mâlik.<sup>68</sup>

‘Abdullâh ibn Mas‘ood used to attend upon the Prophet and had the permission to call upon him at any time. He did not approve of the writing of traditions and complained that although, in his view, nothing except the Qur’an should be committed to writing, people came to enquire from him about the Prophet and then wrote down whatever they heard from him.<sup>69</sup> Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr says that whenever he heard anything about the Prophet from ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Abbâs in the night he took down notes and then made a fair copy in the morning.<sup>70</sup> Barâ’ ibn ‘Âzib was a Companion of the Prophet. Students used to take down his lectures.<sup>71</sup> Nâfi‘, an emancipated slave of Ibn ‘Umar, had been in the company of his master for thirty years. He used to dictate traditions to his disciples.<sup>72</sup> ‘Abdullâh ibn Mas‘ood had a collection of traditions which was shown by his son ‘Abdur-Raḥmân to several persons.<sup>73</sup> Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr is on record that whenever there was a conflict of opinion between him and his friends, he used to record it and then sought a clarification from Ibn ‘Umar, although he never showed the writing to Ibn ‘Umar for he was against the recording of traditions.<sup>74</sup> Al-Aswad was a young man among the descendants of the Prophet’s Companions. He relates that once he found a written collection of the

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<sup>67</sup> *Zâd al-Ma‘âd*, II, p. 57.

<sup>68</sup> *Târeekh at-Ṭabari*, p. 1285.

<sup>69</sup> *Ad-Dârimi*, p. 69.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> *Ad-Dârimi*, p. 69; *al-‘Ilal*, I: p. 42; *Taqyeed*. p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> *Ad-Dârimi*, p. 69.

<sup>73</sup> *Al-Jâmi‘*, I, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 33.

traditions and called upon Ibn ‘Umar with his friend ‘Alqamah, but Ibn ‘Umar erased it completely.<sup>75</sup> Zayd ibn Thâbit acted as Prophet’s amanuensis and was later on charged with the responsibility of making an authorised copy of the Qur’an by Caliph ‘Uthmân. He also did not approve of the writing of traditions. Therefore, in order to get the traditions known to him put into writing, Marwân got a scribe seated behind a curtain and asked Zayd ibn Thâbit to relate whatever he knew about the Prophet.<sup>76</sup> Caliph Mu‘âwiyah, too, once attempted to have some traditions recorded from him in the same manner but Zayd ibn Thâbit got the scent and insisted on erasing what had been written.<sup>77</sup>

Enough facts about the original sources have been cited to leave no shadow of doubt about the existence of authentic and reliable material available for the Prophet’s biography. The quotations and references given here settle the matter that if written records were sufficient to warrant authenticity of historical facts, a vast fund of these records had been left by the Prophet’s Companions. They not only wrote them but also taught their Successors who incorporated everything learnt by them in their own writings. It is to be noted that the generation following the Prophet’s Companions collected and compiled every incident during the lifetime of their teachers. They enquired about every occurrence, every happening personally from door to door, from men and women, from the young and the old, and recorded every fact for further research and verification by the later generations. Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihâb az-Zuhri (d. 124/741), Hishâm ibn ‘Urwâh (d. 146/763), Qays ibn Abi Hâzim, ‘Aṭâ ibn Abu Rabâh (d. 117/735), Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr al-Asdi (d. 95/713) and ‘Abdullâh ibn Dhakwân Abu az-Zinâd (d. 130/747) were among

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<sup>75</sup> *Al-Jâmi‘*, I, p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Al-Musnad*, V, p. 182.

the hundreds of those belonging to the sons and successors of the Prophet's companions who worked incessantly, as if under the cast of an spell, and collected a sweeping data which gives us a panoramic view of the holy Prophet's life, times and happenings. Shihâb az-Zuhri, a great authority on the traditions, inscribed everything he came to know about the Prophet (bpuh). Abu az-Zinâd relates that he recorded only the injunctions of the Prophet relating to things made lawful or unlawful by him while az-Zuhri wrote everything he came to know.<sup>78</sup> Ibn Kaysân, another colleague of az-Zuhri, says that he took down only the sayings and doings of the Prophet, while az-Zuhri insisted on recording everything about the Prophet's Companion too. "For he considered that everything pertaining to the Companions was part of Sunnah," adds Ibn Kaysân, "He was crowned with success while I came to nothing."<sup>79</sup>

Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihab az-Zuhri, whose writings were acquired by the government after the fall of Umayyads on the death of Caliph Waleed ibn Yazeed (126/743), only one of the hundreds of his learned compatriots who had applied themselves to the task of collecting traditions. He was born in 50 A.H. (670 A.D.) and died in the 124 A.H. (741 A.D.). A Qurayshi by descent, he was a keen and diligent student. The trouble he took to collect everything about the Prophet's life is amply borne out by the testimony of his colleagues. It is related that he used to meet every Anṣârî in the Madeenah and ask him to relate whatever incident of the Prophet's life was known to him. He thus met every one whom he could approach, men, women, old and young, and recorded full, complete and comprehensive statements after their verification, with the names of informants. This was the time when a large number of the Prophet's Companions were still alive, and he profited from all of

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<sup>78</sup> *Al-Jâmi'*, p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> *Aṭ-Ṭabaqât*, II, ii, p. 135; *at-Taḳyeed*, p. 107.

them. Similarly, he had numerous disciples whom he taught and dictated his traditions. Az-Zuhri's life is only illustrative of the great interest shown in the recording and compilation of hadiths in his time, for many other young men besides him had wholeheartedly applied themselves to the task.

That the compilation of hadith literature was taken up by *Tâbi'een*, i.e. the sons and disciples of the Prophet's Companions, there has been a widespread misunderstanding amongst the people not well-versed with the science, such as, the orientalists. They deduce from it that since many Companions remained alive by the closing decades of the first century after Hijrah, the compilation of hadith by the *Tâbi'een*, would have been initiated in the second century of the Islamic era.<sup>80</sup> This is far from truth. *Tâbi'een*, are the persons who did not have the opportunity of the Prophet's company, but who had conversed and were associated with the Companions of the Prophet. As already stated, the term applies even to those persons who had been born during the lifetime of the Prophet but were either too young or could not somehow wait upon the Apostle, or were born immediately after his death. Thus every such person born around 11 A.H., when the Prophet left this fleeting world, would be known as a *Tâbi'ee*. The era of *Tâbi'een*, thus, begins immediately after the Prophet's demise in 11 A.H., or even earlier, and not a hundred years thereafter. It is also a fallacy to think that the *Tâbi'een* took up compilation of hadith literature after a hundred years, when all the companions of the Prophet had left the world. The period after the death of the Prophet to the end of the first century after Hijrah is really conterminous with the *Tâbi'een's* period, for none could claim that honour after every companion of the Prophet had bidden farewell

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<sup>80</sup> For a detailed account of the writings of hadiths by the Prophet's Companions and those of their Successors in the first century A.H., see pages 34-106 of *Studies in Early Hadeeth Literature* by Dr. M. M. Azami.

to this world. It would now be clear how grievously mistaken are they who claim that the compilation of hadith literature was started a hundred years after the Prophet's death.

The period during which collection and compilation of the traditions and the related historical data was completed can be divided into three parts. The first extends to the period when the people having first-hand information themselves collected the whole data. Then comes the period when a number of persons took upon themselves the collection and recording to these eye-and-ear-witness accounts by contacting the companions possessing this first-hand information. Finally, in the third phase, the writing of the treatises existing today was taken up. The duration of the first phase stretches, more or less, up to the close of the first century after Hijrah; the second lasts upto 150 A.H.; and the third extends from 150 A.H. to the opening decades of the fourth century. Thus the first phase coincides with the time of the Prophet's Companions and elders among the *Tâbi'een*, the second co-exists with the younger *Tâbi'een* and the disciples of the elder *Tâbi'een*, and the third was the period when the traditionists like Muhammad ibn Ismâ'eel al-Bukhâri, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjâj al-Qushayri, Muhammad ibn 'Eesâ Tirmidhi, and Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ḥanbal wrote their works after digesting the then available material. It would also be clear from what has been explained here that the hadith material collected in the first phase, that is, by the Prophet's Companions and elder *Tâbi'een* was incorporated in the writings of the second phase, and this was in turn utilized for the compilation of dissertations in the third phase. We still have the written record of the second and third phases which is the most precious, authentic and trustworthy material possessed by history. No other historical material of past events extant today is so methodical, continuous and reliable as the hadith literature.

My revered teacher, the late Allâma Shibli, who was also a historian of repute, used to say that almost every other nation had had to record its oral traditions, very often after and interlude of centuries between the happenings and their being put into writing, for the compilation of its history. What they normally did in almost every case was to jot down every prattle and retail gossip without caring to know the sources of those stories. Thereafter probable events were selected by historians through the process of elimination of the incredible reports, and this is how the history of every nation has come to be written. The ancient annals of the European nations are no exception.

The criterion for historicity set by the Muslims was much more severe, however. Its first principle was that the initial narrator of any event, from whom a narration was handed down, should be an eye-witness to the happening recounted by him. Similarly, if there was a chain of narrators who have transmitted the information from one person to another, the characters and antecedents of each should be fully known.<sup>81</sup> It required the scholars to satisfy themselves about the moral conduct, intelligence and reliability of each intervening narrator. It was, of a fact, a Herculean task to find out all these detail about hundreds of thousand persons who formed the chain in the transmission of hadiths, but the scholars devoted their lives to the task. They wandered from one city to another, met every one

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<sup>81</sup> Purporting, to be scientific and applying the so-called historical method, some Western scholars like Schacht have claimed that the isnad, i.e. the transmitting links of the hadith were forged later on. Apart from the fact that these scholars normally take up the books of history or jurisprudence — by no means a right field for the study of isnad — instead of the hadith literature, their theory of “projecting back” of the isnad is refuted by their own studies which show a number of transmitters belonging to scores of provinces giving the same isnad for a particular tradition. For a detailed examination of the subject, see chapter VI of the *Studies in Early Hadeeth Literature*.

acquainted with the narrator of even one tradition and gathered all the requisite information about the transmitting links of hadiths. And, thus came into existence what is called the science of *Asmâ' ar-Rijâl*, or the dictionary of biographers, which sheds light on the lives of at least one hundred thousand persons connected, in any way, with the transmission of the Prophet's traditions.

This was, however, the principle laid down for verification of the antecedents and reliability of the narrators. Rules were also framed for internal criticism and evaluation of the reports handed down by the narrators. These were meant to evaluate, rationally, the correctness of the content of every narration. However, the scholars gave foremost priority to the reliability of the narrators, and were so candidly honest in giving their verdicts about them that their endeavours should be deemed to form a shining chapter of the Islamic history. Among the narrators of traditions, there were also kings and powerful potentates who ruled with an iron hand, but the scholars of hadith, knowing not what fear was, accorded them the place they rightfully deserved by virtue of their personal character, piety and truthfulness or otherwise. Imam Wakee' was a traditionist whose father presided over the state exchequer. Wakee' used to accept traditions handed down by his father only when he found another reliable narrator to support his father, and rejected them if they were narrated by his father alone.<sup>82</sup> Mas'oodi was another scholar of hadith who was paid visit by another scholar, Mu'âdh ibn Mu'âdh, in 154 A.H. (770 A.D.), but since Mas'oodi had to consult his writings in the course of narrating hadiths, Mu'âdh was not satisfied with his memory and had no hesitation in declaring him as untrustworthy.<sup>83</sup> On one occasion Mu'âdh ibn Mu'âdh was offered ten thousand gold *dinârs* merely for withholding evidence in regard

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<sup>82</sup> *At-Tahdheeb*, XI, p. 30.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, VI, 211.

to the reliability or otherwise of certain person, but he turned down the offer contemptuously with the remark: "I can never conceal what is right."<sup>84</sup> Is there any example of similar candidness and veracity in the annals of other nations?

Strange though, it may seem, this entire material of encyclopaedic proportions, consisting of reports considered correct or incorrect, authentic or spurious by the scholars who accepted some and rejected others, is available even today for being sifted and evaluated by us in accordance with the principles laid down for their examination.

The discussion relating to the primary historical data of the Prophet's biography, important, though wearisome, might have appeared to you, has taken too much of the time of this lecture; nevertheless, the matter-of-fact nature of this record demonstrates how very methodical and verifiable is this material. Now let us explain what constitutes the extant sources for the biography of the Prophet of Islam and how were these put together. The first and the foremost source, which is most authentic and reliable is the Qur'an itself whose veracity remains unchallenged even by the most inveterate enemies of Islam. All the important facts about the life of the Prophet, his character and deportment prior to his being invested with the mantle of prophethood, his poverty and orphan-hood, his search for truth and bestowal of apostleship, the coming of revelations and the announcement of his mission, his preaching of the faith and enmity of the infidels, his ascension and migration, his wars and conduct of peaceful negotiations, his character and deportment, in short, every important fact and event of his life finds a reference in this Book which is peerless in its undisputed origin and genuineness.

The second major source is the great mass of traditions, numbering about a hundred thousand, inclusive of all the correct as

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<sup>84</sup> *At-Tahdheeb*, VI, p. 231.

well as the so-called incorrect reports.<sup>85</sup> Out of these were compiled the *Ṣiḥāḥ* or the six authentic books of hadiths after careful sifting and evaluation of each report according to the historical and

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<sup>85</sup> It would be relevant to mention here, briefly, the misunderstanding purposely created by almost every Western orientalist. They are never weary of pointing out the large number of traditions rejected by the earlier scholars as a proof of the unreliability of the entire hadith literature. It is contended, for example, that the fact that Ibn Ḥanbal selected 30,000 out of 750,000 traditions and Bukhari had made his collection from a collection of six hundred thousand, shows that it was all a mass of forgeries and dubious reports. [c.f. A. Guillaume, *Islam*, Penguin Series, Pp. 66, 91; Muir, *The Life of Mohamet*, London (1894) vol. I p. xxxvii; R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge (1962), p. 146; H. A. R. Gibbs, *Mohammadanism*, London (1964), p. 79]. The problem, so puzzling to the orientalists is, however, more an evidence of their slipshod approach to the science than the unauthenticity of the traditions. The traditions do not include only the utterances, deeds and tacit approval of the acts done in the presence of the Prophet (bpuh) but they also cover similar reports in regard to the Companions and their Successors. Then, every single report transmitted through different channels of narrators, which sometimes run to a hundred or more [c.f. Muṣṭafā as-Sibā'ee, *as-Sunnah wa Makānātuha fī al-Islam*, - Cairo (1390/1961), p. 224] is counted as a separate hadith for purposes of its evaluation. It is, thus, not at all surprising if about 10,000 reports handed down by about 4000 Companions of the Prophet were multiplied into several hundreds of thousand narrations by the scholars in order to facilitate their scrutiny. Naturally, if a traditionalist selects a particular hadith as authentic because of its more trustworthy narrators, and rejects the reports of other narrators containing almost even exactly the same narration, it does not mean that all the other reports rejected by him are 'unauthentic' or, 'spurious'. In fact, Bukhari or any other compiler of hadiths never claimed that what had been left out by him was spurious or lacked authenticity. According to the criteria laid down for the criticism of traditions, the traditionalists first make a search about the isnad or chain of narrators of a report, and they call it defective, without any further scrutiny of the subject-matter, if it falls short of their stern criteria of historical criticism. Dr. Muhammad Muṣṭafā Azami has given in his *Studies in Early Hadeeth Literature*, a collection of traditions,=

subjective canons of criticism. There are also other compilations known as *Musnads*, the largest of which is the *al-Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal consisting of six voluminous parts of about 500 pages each printed in small Egyptian type. It lists separately all the authentic traditions pertaining to the Prophet (bpuh) and handed down by various companions and throws a floodlight on the life and character of the Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him).

The journals of the battles fought by the Prophet (bpuh), known as *maghâzi* (campaigns), constitute the third important source for the biographies of the Prophet. Written mainly to record the events relating to expeditions and battles, these contain many interesting details not found elsewhere. The oldest books of *Maghâzi* were written by ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr (d. 94/712), Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihâb az-Zuhri (d. 124/741), Moosa ibn ‘Uqbah (d. 141/758), Ibn Ishâq (d. 150/767), Ziyad al-Bakâ’i (d. 182/798) and Muhammad ibn ‘Umar al-Wâqidi (d. 207/825).

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=transmitted by Bishr ibn al-Ḥusain on the authority of Zakariyah ibn ‘Adi from Anas ibn Mâlik from the Prophet, (Pp. 305-310). It has traditions rejected as unreliable, though about one quarter of these traditions handed down by other narrators are found in Bukhari and Muslim’s *Ṣaḥeeḥ* collections. In other words, Bukhari and Muslim have accepted identical reports with more satisfactory isnad. The only reason for discarding these traditions was that one of the narrators, Zakariyah, did not hear them himself from Anas. Even though the reports of Zakariyah were supported or corroborated by other channels, these were not accepted by the traditionalists for they fell short of their canon of historical criticism. Actually, the matter cannot but impress an honest scholar and strengthen his trust and reliance on the books of hadiths, but nothing can convince those who more often deliberately mistranslate the reports and then produce them as an evidence of the unauthentic character of the hadiths. It is also equally surprising that modern Western writers hardly ever pay any attention to the researches exploding these charges and go on repeating them *ad nauseam*, without least, regard to their pretensions of unbiased and sympathetic approach to Islam.

Fourthly, the books of history associated with the life and times of the Prophet (bpuh) are an invaluable source for the biographers. The more reliable, as well as detailed ones, are the annals known as the *at-Tabaqât* of Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/844), the celebrated *Târeekh ar-Rasool wal Mulook* by Muhammad ibn Jareer at-Tabari (d. 310/923) and two more works of Imam Bukhari entitled *at-Târeekh al-Kabeer* and *at-Târeekh as-Şagheer*. To this category of early historical works also belong the annals written by Ibn Hibbân and Ibn Abi Khuzaymah (d. 99/717) of Baghdad.

The works describing the miracles and spiritual attainments of the Prophet, known as *Kutub ad-Dalâ'il*, have been compiled by a number of scholars. The notable among these, which also form a source material for the Prophet's biographical accounts, are the two *Dalâ'il an-Nubuwwah* by Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) and Abu Ishâq Hârabi (d. 255/868), the *Dalâ'ils* of Imam Bayhaqi (d. 430/1038), Abu Nu'aym Işbahâni (d. 430/1038), al-Mustaghfiri (d. 432/1040) and Abul Qâsim Ismâ'eel al-Işbhâni (d. 535/1140), and, finally, the *Khaşâ'is al-Kubrâ*, a more detailed dissertation by Imam as-Suyooti.

Yet another category of works containing a rich treasure of biographical data relating to the Prophet are books known as *ash-Shamâ'il*, for these are exclusively meant to portray the morals, habits, manners and character of the holy Prophet of Islam (bpuh). The first and the best known among these is the *as-Shamâ'il* of Muhammad ibn 'Eesâ at-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892) on which scores of commentaries were later written by reputed scholars. Another scholarly and voluminous work is *ash-Shifâ fee Huqooq al-Muţţafâ* written by Qâdi 'Ayâd. A commentary on it was written by Shihâb Khafâji under the title of *Naseem ar-Riyâd*. Other treatises on the subject are *Shamâ'il an-Nabi* by 'Abul-'Abbâs Mustaghfiri (d. 432/1040) and *Shamâ'il an-Noor as-Sâti'* by Ibn al-Muqri (d. 253/876) and *Safar as-Sa'adah* by Majd-uddeen Fayroozabâdi (d. 817/1414).

Finally there are the books purporting to be annals of Makkah and Madeenah which give, besides the chronicles of these cities, the conditions obtaining during the life-time of the Prophet (bpuh) and similar other details. These constitute the seventh source for the Prophet's biography. The oldest historical works of this nature are the *Akhbâr Makkah* by al-Azraqi (d. 223/837) and *Akhbâr Madeenah* by 'Umar ibn Shaybah (d. 262/875). Two more works of the same name are by Fâkihi and Ibn Dhabâla.

This brief sketch of the historical records and sources of the biographical works about the Prophet (bpuh) is sufficient to convince everybody, whether a friend or foe, about the authentic character of material. You would have noticed that the great traditionists of the past did not rely merely on the memories and oral reports but they also established study circles in the mosques and *madrasas* for the study of traditions and the *Maghâzi*. 'Âsim ibn 'Umar ibn Qatâdah (d. 121/737) was the grandson of one of the Prophet's Companions, Qatâdah Anshâri. He wrote books on *Maghâzi* and *Siyâr* (biographies) and also delivered lectures to a group of students in the mosque of Damascus in pursuance of an order given by Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azeez. Actually, the number of the Prophet's biographies written right from his own times to this day in different countries and languages would be several thousand. In Urdu alone there would be several hundred such monographs although its (Urdu's) literary history does not go beyond two hundred years, at the most, and serious dissertations in the language actually came to be written only after the upheaval of 1857.

For it is a cardinal principle of the Muslims' faith to pay their regard to the illustrious Prophet, let us turn our attention to the endeavours made by the followers of other religions to study the life of Muhammad (bpuh). A number of Hindus, Sikhs, Brahmo Samajis and others in India have written the biographies of the holy Prophet

(bpuh). Europe has also had a long tradition, despite its hatred towards Islam, of the studies undertaken in this field, even though these were more often taken up for serving the needs of evangelism or for historical and literary purposes. *Al-Muqtabas* (The Adaptation), a literary magazine of Damascus, published a list of European works on the life of the Prophet, some fifteen or sixteen years back, which listed thirteen hundred books.<sup>86</sup> Prof. D.S. Margoliouth, who was a teacher of Arabic in the Oxford University, had written a biography of the Prophet, which was published in the series of the Heroes of Nations in 1906. No exposition more inimical has ever been brought out with a confessedly Jewish bias by any other biographer of the Prophet, at least in the English language, for the author has left no stone unturned to cull out something from the original sources to distort everything connected with the life and teachings of Muhammad, yet he had to acknowledge in his introduction to the book that — “The biographers of the Prophet Mohammad form a long series which it is impossible to end, but in which it would be honourable to find a place.”<sup>87</sup>

There is, also, a sympathetic Christian biographer John Davenport, who begins his biography of the Prophet entitled, *An Apology for Muhammad and the Qur'an*<sup>88</sup> with the acknowledgement of the fact that of all the lawmakers and conquerors there is not one the events of whose life are more true and more detailed than those of the Prophet Muhammad.

R. Bosworth Smith, late fellow of Trinity College of Oxford, delivered a series of lectures on, ‘Mohammad and Mohammedanism’

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<sup>86</sup> The number should have at least been doubled during the past fifty years (i.e., until 1925).

<sup>87</sup> *Muhammad and Rise of Islam*, New York (1906), p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Published in London in 1969.

under the auspices of the Royal Institution of Great Britain in February and March, 1874. He says in his lectures which were later on enlarged and published under the same title:

“And, what is true of the religion generally, is also true, unfortunately, of those three religions which I have called, for want of a better name, historical — and of their founders. We know all too little of the first and earliest labourers; too much, perhaps, of those who have entered into their labours. We know less of Zoroaster and Confucius than we do of Solon and Socrates; less of Moses and Buddha than we do of Ambrose and Augustine. We know indeed some fragments of a fragment of Christ’s life; but who can lift the veil of the thirty years that prepared the way for the three? What we do know indeed has renovated a third of the world, and may yet renovate much more; an ideal of life at once remote and near; possible and impossible, but how much we do not know! What do we know of His mother, of His home life, of His early friends, of His relation to them, of the gradual dawning, or, it may be, the sudden revelation, of His divine mission? How many questions about Him occur to each of us which must always remain questions?

But in Mohammedanism everything is different; here instead of shadowy and the mysterious we have history. We know as much of Mohammad as we do even of Luther and Milton. The mythical, the legendary, the supernatural is almost wanting in the original Arab authorities, or at all events can easily be distinguished from what is historical. Nobody here is the dupe of himself or of others; there is the full light of day upon all that that life can ever reach at all.”<sup>89</sup>

The Muslims have written innumerable biographies of their Prophet, and are still writing more of them, it would be no exaggeration to claim that each one of these is more detailed, more

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<sup>89</sup> *Mohammad and Mohammedanism*, Pp. 16-18.

reliable and based on more authentic historical records than that of any other Prophet or founder of religion written by his followers. This is a continuing process: each generation has studied afresh the original sources, traditions and ear-and-eye-witness reports, shed fresh light on the Prophet's life, and, passed on the fruits of its labour to the succeeding generation. *Al-Muwatta'*, the first compilation of traditions was learnt by 400 persons from its author, Mâlik ibn Anas, and his disciples included rulers as well as scholars, legists as well as litterateurs. Sixty thousand persons had attended the discourses of al-Farbari, lecturing on the *Ṣaḥeeḥ* of his mentor, Bukhari. Were similar arrangements ever made for propagating the teachings and biographical data of any other founder of any religion? Was the biography of any other prophet transmitted, preserved and compiled with the same care? Who can claim this honour save Muhammad — on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord!

## Four

### PERFECTION

Perfection is the test of an ideal life. Historicity of any character is, however, not the criterion of perfection, although it is absolutely essential to have a solid and complete knowledge about the life and conduct of a perfect guide and an ideal mentor.

The life of Muhammad (Blessings and peace be upon him), from his birth to his death, is before us like an open book. His Companions knew him in full and they also took care to transmit whatever they knew about him to the posterity. There was never a span of time, howsoever small, that the Prophet had spent in seclusion, away from the gaze of his childhood, his boyhood and youth, his trade and commerce, his behaviour with his friends, his marriage, his participation in the battle of the Quraysh and the treaty thereafter, his earning the title of 'trustworthy', installation of the black stone of Ka'bah by him, his meditations and prayers in the cave of Ḥirâ', the coming of revelations, birth of Islam, his preachings and opposition by the Makkans, his wanderings in Ṭâ'if, his ascension to the Heaven and migration to Madeenah, his incursions and battles, the treaty of Hudaibiyah concluded by him, his epistles to the kings and rulers of surrounding countries, his farewell pilgrimage, the completion of revelation and his death, in short, there is nothing of his life that is not known to the world. All of it was put into writing: even what was known to be ambiguous was also preserved by his

followers so that the coming generations might themselves be able to decide what was acceptable or not. One might ask: “Why were the traditions known to be weak or untrustworthy preserved at all by the early traditionists? What was the wisdom behind it?” Really, it was not without purpose, for they did not want to be accused of suppressing unfavourable reports about their Prophet — a criticism pertinently applied to the Christian Gospels. This was the proof of their genuine candour and faith in the strength of their Prophet’s character.

The traditionists do not hide anything about the Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him). The manner of his speaking, sitting, lying, sleeping, dressing and walking; his marriages, wives, children, friends and followers; his engagements in camps and cantonments; his prayers in the mosque and command of armies in the battlefields; his habits, likes and dislikes; even his dealings with his wives in privacy — everything can be found here as plain as day. To be more exact, let us quote here the headings of the chapters of the *Shamâ’il* of Muhammad ibn ‘Eesâ at-Tirmidhi, a book on the appearance, habits and character of the Prophet (bpuh).

Chapter 1. Prophet’s appearance and features

Chapter 2. His hairs

Chapter 3. His combs

Chapter 4. His grey hairs

Chapter 5. His hair-dye

Chapter 6. His use of Collyrium

Chapter 7. His dress

Chapter 8. His daily routine

Chapter 9. His stockings

Chapter 10. His shoes

Chapter 11. His finger ring

Chapter 12. His sword

Chapter 13. His chain armour

Chapter 14. His helmet

Chapter 15. His turban

Chapter 16. His pair of trousers

Chapter 17. His gait

Chapter 18. His covering of the face with cloth

Chapter 19. The manner of his sitting

Chapter 20. His bedding and pillow

Chapter 21. His reclining against the pillow

Chapter 22. His eating habits

Chapter 23. His manner of taking bread

Chapter 24. His manner of taking soup and meat

Chapter 25. His way of ablution

Chapter 26. His invocations before and after taking meals

Chapter 27. His bowls and cups

Chapter 28. Fruits taken by him

Chapter 29. On his drinks

Chapter 30. How he drank?

Chapter 31. His use of perfumes

Chapter 32. His way of talking

Chapter 33. His manner of reciting verses

Chapter 34. His narration of stories

Chapter 35. His way of sleeping

Chapter 36. His way of praying

Chapter 37. His way of smiling

Chapter 38. His wit and humour

Chapter 39. His morning prayers

Chapter 40. His voluntary prayers at home

Chapter 41. His fasts

Chapter 42. His recital of the Qur'an

Chapter 43. His lamentations at prayer

Chapter 44. His beddings

Chapter 45. His hospitality

Chapter 46. His politeness

Chapter 47. Trimmings of his hair

Chapter 48. His names

Chapter 49. His mode of living

Chapter 50. His age

Chapter 51. His death

Chapter 52. His bequest

These are the topics discussed, briefly or in detail, describing every aspect of his life, whether he was in the midst of his wives and children, or among his friends and followers, every moment of his life was reported and recorded.

Even the greatest of men are commoners in their own houses. That is why Voltaire once remarked that “No man is a hero to his valet.” But Voltaire’s dictum was reversed, says Bosworth Smith, at least in the case of Muhammad. A historian like Edward Gibbon avouches that “The first and most arduous conquests of Mahomet were those of his wife, his servant, his pupil and his friend; since he presented himself as a prophet to those who were most conversant with his infirmities as a man.”<sup>90</sup> With enthusiasm they all yielded to the voice of prophecy.

It cannot be gainsaid that nobody can be more aware of the weaknesses of a man than his own wife. And, is it not a fact that the first who believed in the mission of Muhammad was Khadeejah, his own wife, who had been his Companion for the last fifteen years? Was she not expected to know him inside out, but no sooner than did he make the claim to apostleship that she confirmed the veracity of his message.

But, this is not all. No man, howsoever great or truthful, can allow his wife to tell others everything she knows about him. Nobody can take this risk even if he has only one wife. The Prophet (bpuh), however, had nine wives, and he had permitted all of them to tell everyone whatever they saw of him doing in the light of the day or the darkness of the night. He had definitely asked them not to keep anything secret about him. Is there even one example of a similar self-confidence and moral courage exhibited by any man in any age?

All the books on traditions speak eloquently about the fine virtues and high morals of the Prophet (bpuh). However, of these one that deserves to be specially mentioned here is the *Kitâb ash-Shifâ’* of Qâḍî ‘Ayâḍ al-Andalusi. A European orientalist once told me, during

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<sup>90</sup> *The Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*, vol. V, p. 351-52.

my visit to France, that it would be sufficient to render Qâḍi ‘Ayâḍ’s *ash-Shifâ’* in one of the European languages for acquainting the Westerners with the moral virtues of the holy Prophet. Of a fact the information available today about the character and morals of the Prophet can be gauged from the sub-headings of the chapter on ‘Character’ of the Prophet, in my own book entitled *Seerat an-Nabi*. These are: His countenance, the Seal of Prophethood,<sup>91</sup> his hair, gait, speech, smile and laughter, dress, finger-ring, chain-armour and helmet, the food relished by him and his manner of eating, his habits in eating, his liking for good dress, colours preferred and disliked by him, the perfumes used by him, his refined taste and fondness for riding.

The section dealing with the Prophet’s daily routine covers his pursuits from morn till eve: sleep, prayer at night, habits in prayers, sermons, travels and holy wars, manner of consoling others, cordiality and general pursuits.

In regard to his assemblies the details given are about the conclave of the Prophet, his sermon sessions, etiquette of the meetings, their timings, special gatherings of women, way of address, liveliness of pronouncements, influence on participants, manner of expression, nature and content of speeches and their effectiveness.

The captions dealing with the Prophet’s worship are supplication, orison, fasting, poor-due (zakah), charity, pilgrimage, remembrance of God, ardour for the Lord’s companionship, prayers in the battlefield, awe of God, lamentations, love of God, reliance on God, endurance and thanksgiving.

The moral virtues of the Prophet have been explained with the details about his character, perseverance, politeness, fair dealing,

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<sup>91</sup> A large mole on the Prophet’s back which is said to have been a divine sign of his prophetic office.

justice, generosity, selflessness hospitality, aversion to begging and refusal to take alms, acceptance of presents, avoidance of obligations by others, non-violence, dislike for the show of piety, disdain of flattery and fault-finding, simplicity, distaste for riches and ostentation, sense of equality, dislike for undue veneration and approbation, sense of modesty, doing of his work himself, fortitude, forbearance and forgiveness, pardoning of the pagans and enemies, kindness to unbelievers, treatment to the Jews and Christians, affection for the poor, prayers for the welfare of his foes, love for children, courtesy to women, kindness to animals, affection and mercifulness, kind-heartedness, nursing the sick and consoling the bereaved, wit and humour, affection for his own children and treatment of his wives.

Hâfidh ibn Qayyim has given in the *Zâd al-Ma'âd* even additional details about the personal bearing and deportment of the Prophet (bpuh), such as, his communications and correspondence, his marital life, his manner of sleeping and getting up, his way of riding, his manner of accepting slaves for his service, his dealings in sales and purchases, how he satisfied his physical needs, his growing and cropping of moustaches, his manner of speaking and keeping silence, lamenting and laughing, how he delivered his sermons, how he performed ablution, *mash* (wiping) and *tayammum* (dry ablution), the way he offered prayers, performed prostrations and ended the prayers, his prayers in the mosque and at home, his vigils and orisons in the night, his manner of performing funeral prayers, his recitation of the Qur'an, his charities, his fasts at home and in travels and the fasts in the month of Ramadân and on other days, his meditations and way of performing pilgrimage, his offering of oblations, his performance of Friday prayers, how he performed the rite of *'aqeeqah* (sacrifice of an animal) for new born babies as also naming and circumcision of children, the way he entered a house after

seeking permission, his invocations before and after meals and on sighting the new moon, how he saluted and invoked blessings on others, the way he set off for travels, his method of solemnising marriages, his dislike for harsh language, how he treated the captives, spies and hypocrites, his dealings with the followers of revealed religions and unbelievers and his method of treating certain ailments.

The list of subjects treated by the authors, some of which have been cited here, are merely illustrative of the details available about the life and character, conduct and behaviour of the Prophet of Islam. They show how meticulously every incident, great or small, important or insignificant relating to the Prophet's life has been preserved, leaving nothing more to be desired. These details also show, by the same token, what the perfection of any character really means and how the Prophet of Islam (bpuh) stands apart from all other founders of religions in having a complete and exhaustive record of every aspect of his life and character preserved for the benefit of posterity.

It is no less significant that the Prophet of Islam (bpuh) had given definite instructions to his followers that whatever they saw of him, saying or doing, amongst them or alone, in the mosque or in the battlefield, leading the prayers or conducting wars, on the pulpit or in a closet, should invariably be brought to the notice of others. His wives, as a consequence, freely talked about his private affairs while seventy of his followers lived close to his house in his mosque to learn all about him. These Companions earned their living by selling firewood collected from the forest or similar other trades, but they had arranged between themselves to leave a party always in attendance of the Prophet so that nothing escaped their attention. One out of these seventy was Abu Hurayrah who is credited with the transmission of the largest number of traditions or reports about the Prophet. There were also the inhabitants of Madeenah besides these

seventy Companions, who attended congregational prayers led by the Prophet, five times a day, for ten long years. All of them had the opportunity of observing his actions, habits and customs. Then, there were occasions when even larger numbers gathered round the Prophet. In the expedition for the capture of Makkah, ten thousand Muslims accompanied the Prophet while their number was thirty thousand in the battle of Tabook and one hundred thousand during the Farewell Pilgrimage. Everybody knew that it was a bounden duty lying upon him to tell others whatever he came to know about the Messenger of God. Nothing about his life from the closet of his sleeping chamber to the market place, thus, ever remained a secret, and everything of it was handed down from generation to generation. But, all this abundance of reports about him notwithstanding, even his most inveterate enemies could never bring up any charge against him except polygamy and the holy wars waged by him. Which will you call a spotless and virtuous life — that of Muhammad, the Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him), or the life of those already shrouded in mystery?

One more aspect of Muhammad's life needs attention. He was not always surrounded by his devoted followers. He spent the first forty years of his life with the Quraysh in Makkah. He had his business dealings with them which is a sure test of one's honesty and trustworthiness. How he acquitted himself in these transactions, when he was still a youth, is illustrated by the fact that he won the title of *al-Ameen* (the Trustworthy) from the Makkans. Even after he was favoured with the revelation from the All-High those who opposed his claim to prophethood had such a trust in his honesty that they entrusted their valuables to his safe keeping. It is well known fact that the Prophet had to leave behind 'Ali, on the occasion of his migration to Madeenah, for returning several of these goods to their owners. The whole of Makkah had stood up against the Prophet,

boycotted and heaped invectives upon him, thrown rubbish and stones on him, made plans to kill him and accused him of being an enchanter and a poet and a lunatic, but none ever dared bring his character and morals in question. Does not the claim to divine apostleship mean a claim to innocence and unblemished character? Would have not a few instances of his immoral behaviour been sufficient to refute his claim to prophethood? Why was it that the Quraysh spent their wealth and put their own lives at stake but they never framed any charge to blemish his character? Does this not prove that the Prophet (bpuh) was as much above reproach in the eyes of his foes as he was to his followers?

Once all the leading men of the Quraysh had assembled to talk about the problem posed by the Prophet's defiance to pagan gods. An-Naḍr ibn al-Hârith, the more experienced among them, got up and said: "O' Quraysh, a situation has arisen which you cannot deal with. Muhammad was a young man most liked amongst you, most truthful in speech and most trustworthy, until, when you saw grey hairs on his temple, and he brought you a message, you said he was a sorcerer, a diviner, a poet and was possessed, but by God, there is nothing of this sort in Muhammad for I have heard him speaking and preaching."<sup>92</sup>

None was a greater enemy of the Prophet than Abu Jahl, but he once said to him: "Muhammad, I do not call you a liar, but I do not think that whatever you preach is correct." It was on this occasion that the revelation came —

﴿We know well how their talk grieves you, though in truth they deny not you [Muhammad], but evil-doers flout the revelations of Allah.﴾

(*Qur'an* 6: 33)

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<sup>92</sup> Ibn Hishâm, p. 191.

When the Prophet (bpuh) was commanded to announce the truth he had received, he climbed the top of a hill and called out the Quraysh. After they had all gathered round him, he asked them: "What would you think, if I were to tell you that the enemy is lying in ambush behind this hillock to attack you?" The reply he received was, "O' Yes. For we have never heard you speaking a lie."<sup>93</sup>

After the envoy of the Prophet had delivered his message to the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, the latter called for Abu Sufiyân, a sworn enemy of the Prophet, who had been arraying his forces against him for the last six years, for making enquiries about the man who had dared to address him. An enemy was thus called to avouch for his bitterest foe whom he wanted to destroy at any cost. Abu Sufiyân also knew that if he could somehow provoke the passions of the powerful Emperor against his adversary, the Roman legions could devastate Madeenah in a couple of days. But this was the conversation that passed on between the two:

Heraclius first demanded: "Tell me about his lineage amongst you."

"It is pure", replied Abu Sufiyân, "our best lineage."

"Has any of his house made the same claim earlier?" asked Heraclius again.

"No." replied Abu Sufiyân.

Heraclius now questioned, "Did anybody possess sovereignty in his family?"

Abu Sufiyân had again to say, "No" in reply.

Now Heraclius put another question: "What sort of men are those who have accepted his religion? Are they poor or influential people?"

"Weak and helpless", replied Abu Sufiyân.

Heraclius asked again, "Is the number of his followers increasing or decreasing?"

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<sup>93</sup> Tirmidhi, *Tafseer Soorah al-An'âm*.

“Increasing”, Abu Sufiyân had to acknowledge, in reply.

“Has he ever told you a lie?”, demanded the Emperor.

Abu Sufiyân again replied in the negative and then Heraclius enquired, “Has he ever been treacherous?”

“No”, said Abu Sufiyân in reply, but added, “But we will see what he does in future.”

“And what does he teach you?” was the last question asked by Heraclius.

“He asks us”, replied Abu Sufiyân, “to worship only One God, to offer prayers, to become virtuous, to speak the truth and to discharge our obligations to the kinsmen.”<sup>94</sup>

Does Muhammad need any more proof in support of the perfection of his character? Was such a conclusive evidence ever produced for anyone by one’s enemy?

But, there is something more about Muhammad (bpuh) that catches the eye. Those who first found credence in the call of Muhammad were neither the fishermen of a subject race nor the despised slaves of a Pharaoh: they belonged to a free and proud race, never subjected to alien rule in their memory. Known for their pragmatism, they were the people who had commercial dealings with Iran, Syria and Asia Minor. They have left their marks, still visible today, as a keen, intelligent and sagacious people. They produced military generals comparable to the greatest of conquerors, fought valiantly against forces many time their numbers and acquitted themselves well as rulers of vast and populous lands. Can anybody feign that the men who had proved the strength of their arms and intellect had remained ignorant of the true character of their own guide and teacher? Was it ever possible to dupe such a people? Rather, they were the people who followed in the footsteps of their

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<sup>94</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 655.

mentor with the greatest enthusiasm and took every possible step to preserve the memory of their beloved master. This is, of a fact, an incontrovertible sign of the perfection of Muhammad's Character.

The Prophet never tried to hide anything about him. He was known to all as he was. His wife 'Â'ishah, who had been his closest Companion for nine years, relates: "Never believe one who says that Muhammad had suppressed any commandment of God, for God Himself attests:

«The duty of the messenger is only to convey [the message]. Allah knows what you proclaim and what you hide.»<sup>95</sup> (*Qur'an* 5: 99)

Nobody ever wants to reveal his weaknesses — and spiritual and moral preceptors, the least of all. Still, the *Qur'an* has several verses admonishing the Prophet (bpuh) on his apparent mistakes. Each of these verses was read out to others by him, memorised by the people and has ever since been recited in the mosques and the homes. Had these verses not alluded to the Prophet's mistakes, the world would have never come to know at least some of them. But these were pointed out by God, for this was the character to be presented in the full light of day as the prototype of all human perfection.

The marriage of the Prophet with the divorced wife of his adopted son was an act detestable of the Arabs. Yet the incident has been described at length in the *Qur'an*. 'Â'ishah says that if Prophet had the option to suppress any verse of the *Qur'an*, he would certainly have not divulged these to avoid criticism<sup>96</sup>, the very fact that the Prophet gave out even these verses testifies that nothing about his life and character remains in the dark.

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<sup>95</sup> *Aş-Şaheeh, Tafseer Soorah al-Mâ'idah* (*Qur'an* 5: 99).

<sup>96</sup> *Al-Musand*, VI, p. 233.

It may be useful to recall here the attestation of Bosworth Smith, who writes:

“There is full light of day upon all that light can ever reach at all. ‘The abysmal depth of personality’ indeed are, and must always remain, beyond the reach of any line and plummet of ours. But we know everything of the external history of Muhammad — his youth, his appearance, his relations, his habits; the first idea and the gradual growth, intermittent though it was, of his great revelation; while for his internal history, after his mission had been proclaimed, we have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation, and in the chaos of its contents, but on the substantial authenticity of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt. There, if in any book, we have a mirror of one of the master-spirits of the world; often inartistic, incoherent, self-contradictory, dull, but impregnated with a few grand ideas which stand out from the whole; a mind seething with the inspiration pent within it, ‘intoxicated with God’, but full of human weaknesses, from which he never pretended — and it is his lasting glory that he never pretended — to be free.”<sup>97</sup>

Bosworth Smith further goes on to say:

“It has been remarked by Gibbon that no incipient Prophet ever passed through so severe an ordeal as Muhammad, since he first presented himself as a Prophet to those who were not conversant with his infirmities as a man. Those who knew him best, his wife, his eccentric slave, his cousin, his earliest friend — he, who, as Mohammad said, alone of his coverts, ‘turned not back, neither was perplexed’ — were the first to recognise his mission. The ordinary lot of a Prophet was in his case reversed; he was not without honour save among those who did not know him well.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Muhammad and Muhammadanism*, Pp. 17-18.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127.

The more intimately one knew the Prophet, the more one admired him. The men who first placed trust in the mission of prophets before Muhammad were those who knew least about them, and their friends and relations were the last to follow them. But the case was entirely different with Muhammad (bpuh). He first won the allegiance of those who were closest to him, knew him intimately and had a personal experience of his dealings, conduct and behaviour. What is more, all of them had to pass through a gruelling test as well. Khadeejah, the Prophet's wife, had to endure the rigours of a boycott imposed by the Makkans for three long years when she had to live in the Sh'eb Abi Tâlib. Abu Bakr had to accompany his mentor when the enemy thirsting for his blood, was looking into every nook and corner to lay his hand on the Prophet. 'Ali had to sleep on the bed whose owner had been earmarked for assassination in the same night. Zayd was emancipated by his master, but he would rather prefer to live with his former owner than return home with his father.

Paying a tribute to the earnestness of the Prophet's Companions Godfrey Haggins says that, "The Christians would do well to recollect that the doctrines of Mohammad created a degree of enthusiasm in his followers which is to be sought in vain with the immediate followers of Jesus (may peace be upon him)... when Jesus was led to the Cross, his followers fled, their enthusiasm forsook them, they left him to perish... the followers of Mohammad, on the contrary, rallied round their persecuted prophet, and, risking their lives in his defence, made him triumph over all his enemies."<sup>99</sup>

The Apostle of God was hemmed in from all sides by the enemy in the battle of Uḥud. He called out: "Who will barter his life for me?" No sooner than did his followers hear the summon that seven of the Anṣârs rushed to defend the Prophet and fought, man

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<sup>99</sup> *An Apology for the Life of Mohammad.*

after man, and died like heroes<sup>100</sup>. An Anṣārī woman lost her father, brother and husband in the same battle. She heard about the death of his nearest kins, one by one, but unmindful of her loss she continued to enquire: “Is the Prophet of God alright?” At last she was told that the Prophet was alive; but not content with the news, she came herself to see the Prophet and exclaimed: “No calamity shall befall us so long as you are alive.”

My father, my husband, my brother and I myself,  
All can be put to stake, my lord, for thy sake.

This was the love felt all too deeply by those who knew the Prophet (bpuh) intimately. Would it be possible for anyone to sacrifice his life for another man unless he considers him a perfect model of cardinal virtues? This is the reason why Islam presents the life of Muhammad as a perfect model and an example for the entire humanity and calls upon us to love him if we want to be loved by God.

﴿Say, [O’ Muhammad to mankind]: If you should love Allah, Follow me; Allah will love you...﴾ (Qur’an 3: 31)

To follow the Prophet is, then, the test of one’s love for God. It is easy to burn oneself in a moment like a moth, but it is extremely difficult to follow in the footsteps of a guide assiduously until one’s hour is come. It was a very severe ordeal, no doubt, but it was passed through with flying colours by every Companion of the Prophet. This had become the goal of their lives: an ideal which made the Prophet’s Companions and their disciples assume the role of biographers, chroniclers and historians. They made it a great task of their lives to find out each and everything about their beloved Prophet and preserve it for the coming generations. This, in itself, is a proof of the perfection of the Prophet’s life and character in the eyes of his

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<sup>100</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, Pp. 380-81.

immediate successors. Nothing else would have engaged their attention so thoroughly.

For Islam holds up the life of the holy Prophet (bpuh) as a perfect model for every Muslim, it needs must be completely known in all its aspects and details. And, the fact is that it has actually been so for the last one and a half thousand years, illuminating the path of countless believers over the ages. There is nothing in the dark, nothing missing — all that the Muslims needed to know of him for the edification of their souls was always found by them. A man whose life was so intimately known could have alone been held as a model guide, as an exemplar and as a sinless man of God by innumerable saints and savants, and hence the verdict of history also goes in his favour.

Babylon, Assyria, India, China, Egypt, Palestine and Greece have been the cradles of ancient civilizations. Ethical norms were set up by the great philosophers of these countries, rules and conventions were evolved for eating and drinking, food and dress, marriages and deaths, festivals and bereavements. These were elaborated over hundreds of years, but destroyed in no time. Islam formulated the principles of its civilization in a couple of years, yet they continue to rule over the nations for thousand of years. They were found equally useful by all because they emanated from a single source — the life of the holy Prophet (bpuh). This was the model which had left a profound imprint upon the Companions, patterned their lives and set the model for their successors, thus, making it the ideal way of life for the whole Islamic world. The sacred life of the Prophet was the nucleus round which revolved the lives of his Companions and subsequent generations. It was made a full circle by the peoples of different stocks joining in the perambulation. The civilization thus reared by the genius of different Muslim nationalities may differ to some extent and may also have some shortcomings, but the soul

which runs through it is one, complete and wholesome. Wherever there may be Muslims, they would derive inspiration from the same gold mine. Let me illustrate it by an example. Whenever any savage of the dark continent or even a civilized persons living in India embraces Christianity, he is taught to imitate the culture of the materialistic West although he takes his spiritual lessons from the Gospels. But, whatever may be the stage of development of any nation accepting Islam, it has to look to the same shining example for religion as well as culture, for morals as well as customs. The moment one enters the fold of Islam, one finds the life of the Prophet before him, pointing the way to be followed in different situations and circumstances. It is a living example, a mirror reflecting all the conditions and complexions of the human life.

A Jew, who wanted to find fault with the Muslims, once said to a Companion of the Prophet, "Your Prophet teaches you everything, even trifling matters?" "Yes", came the prompt reply, "Our Prophet teaches us even about abstersion after urination and excretion." The Muslims are still proud of this noblest exemplar for all human beings: he is the heaven's gift, a standard by which every man can reform and renovate his life and morals, body and spirit, behaviour and conduct and habits and manners. The people having faith in Islam need nothing beyond the standard set by the Prophet for their cultural, moral and social progress. The Prophet's life is the universal touchstone: it draws a distinction between the vice and the virtue, the good and the bad. For the world lacks another exemplar like the Prophet: he alone is the perfect model for the whole world. May God, the Most-High have peace and mercy on him.

## Five

# COMPREHENSIVENESS

«Say [O' Muhammad to mankind]: if you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you...» (Qur'an 3: 31)

The cardinal principle of religion is to love God and make oneself worthy of the love and mercy of God. And, to achieve this great purpose, almost every religion teaches its votaries to follow the shown path by its founder. Islam, however, raises the whole level of religious thought and action by placing the scripture, or the *Kitâb*, as well as the paradigm of its Prophet, or his *Sunnah*, before the believer for their guidance. The *Kitâb* stands for the divine commandments revealed to show the Will of God while the *Sunnah* is the practical illustration furnished by the Prophet's life spent in conformity with that Will. The practice of the Prophet is contained in its fullness in the traditions, or the *hadiths*, in order to direct and guide the seeker after truth on the path of religion to a deep and real spiritual experience.

No religion can have all of its followers belonging to the same class or profession. Diversions of views and leanings and differences in professions and callings are the compelling needs of our earthly life. The world has to have kings and rulers as well as serfs and subjects; the judges and the jurists for the administration of the law and commanders of the armies for maintaining the security of the realm; the poor and the rich, the mendicants and the warriors, the

businessmen and the priests for keeping the wheels of life moving onwards. Everyone of these needs an exemplar who may show the right path to him in his own sphere of life. But, Islam invites all of them to follow the example of its Prophet. This, in other words, means that the life presented by it as a model for all of them has a precedent for every class and a practical example of ideal life in every field of diverse callings. The claim, by itself, illustrates, the comprehensiveness of its model asked to be followed by all. For no affluent person can set an example to be followed by the poor, nor the poor for the rich, nor the ruler for the ruled, nor yet the ruled for the ruler, it was necessary to have a universal model, a comprehensive and abiding exemplar like a bouquet containing flowers of every tint and hue.

Apart from the diversity of classes and callings, the life of man consists of a wide range of moods and inclinations governing his actions in different situations and circumstances. We walk and sit, we eat and sleep, we laugh and weep, we give and take, we kill and get killed, in short, we act in different ways on different occasions. Sometimes we pay homage to God, at others we engage in our business; we are often guests or act as hosts; and, for all these occasions we need a precedent to know the correct way of behaviour suited for that occasion.

Besides the actions involving physical exertions, there are also those which relate to the head and heart of man and which we call sentiments. Our sentiments or impulsions are ever-changing; often we are pleased and at times we get angry and agitated; feelings of hope and dejection, of pleasure and affliction and of success and failure are different states of mind which alternately take hold of us and influence our actions. The moderateness of these emotions holds the key to the best and correct behaviour in all circumstances. Therefore, we need a model of practical morality who can show us

how to exercise control over our inborn tendencies of extremism and excess. We require a practical model discipline our emotions and feelings, and such was the emblem of the moderation who once lived in the city of Madeenah.

We have to be resolute, unwavering, courageous, patient, resigned, self-sacrificing, benevolent and merciful according to different situations of life that we come across on different occasions. We need a practical example to regulate our behaviour in each of these varied conditions. But, where are we to look for them except in Muhammad? In Moses we can see an intrepid leader but not a merciful preceptor; Jesus of Nazareth can be a model of leniency and kindness, but he lacks the ardour that warms the blood of the weak and poor.

Man needs both of these and has also to learn how to keep a correct balance between the two. He can find both these qualities perfectly tempered in a harmonious manner in the life of the Prophet of Islam (bpuh).

A model which can serve as a standard for every class of the people acting under different circumstances and states of human emotions will be found in the life of Muhammad. If you are rich, there is the example of the tradesman of Makkah and the master of Bahrain's treasures; if you are poor, you can follow the internee of Shu'ab Abi Tālib and the émigré of Madeenah; if you are a king, watch the actions of the ruler of Arabia; if you are a vassal, look at the man enduring hardships imposed by the Quraysh of Makkah; if you are a conqueror, look at the victor of Badr and Hunayn; if you have suffered a defeat, take a lesson from the one discomfited at Uhud; if you are a teacher, learn from the holy mentor of the school of *aş-Suffah*; if you are a student, look at the learner who sat before Gabriel; if you are a sermoner, direct your eyes to the discourser delivering sermons in the mosque at Madeenah; if you are charged to

preach the gospel of truth and mercy to your persecutors, observe the helpless preacher explaining the message of God to the pagans of Makkah; if you have brought your enemy to his knees, look at the conqueror of Makkah; if you want to administer your lands and properties, discover how the lands and groves of Bani an-Nadheer, Khaybar and Fadak were managed; if you are an orphan, do not forget the child of Âminah and ‘Abdullâh left to the tender mercy of Haleemah; if you are young, see the character of Makkah’s shepherd; if you have a travelling business, cast a glance at the leader of caravan under way to Baṣra; if you are a judge or arbiter, look at the umpire entering the holy sanctuary before the peep of the dawn and installing *Ḥajr al-Aswad* (black stone) in the Ka‘bah, or the justice of peace in whose eyes the poor and the rich were alike; if you are a husband, study the behaviour of the husband of Khadeejah and ‘Â’ishah; if you are a father, go through the biography of Fâtimah’s father and grandfather of Ḥassan and Ḥusayn; in short, whoever and whatever you may be, you would find a shining example in the life of the holy Prophet to illuminate your behaviour. He is the only beacon of light and guidance for every seeker after truth. If you have the life of the Prophet of Islam before you, you can find the examples of all the prophets, Noah and Abraham, Job and Jonah and Moses and Jesus (may peace be upon them all). If the life and character of each prophet of God were deemed to be a shop selling the wares of one commodity, that of Muhammad would verily be a variety store where goods of every description can be had to suit the tastes and needs of all.

My friend, Ḥasan ‘Ali, used to bring out a magazine named *Noor al-Islam* from Patna (Bihar, India) some thirty or forty years back. Once he had published in his journal the views of a Hindu friend of his about Muhammad (bpuh). In answer to the question why he held the Prophet of Islam to be the greatest and the most perfect of

men ever born in the world and what opinion he held about Jesus (may peace be upon him), this learned friend of Ḥasan ‘Ali had replied that Jesus, in comparison to Muhammad, appeared to be an innocent child, articulating sweet words before a man of wisdom. Asked to elucidate the reason for considering Muhammad to be the greatest man, he had replied: “I find in his character such diverse and manifold qualities as it would be impossible to find in any other man whose biography has been preserved by history. He is a king having a whole country under his control but never claiming mastery over even his own self, ever taking pride in his being the serf of God. He is the master of camel-loads of treasure getting into his capital from far and near, yet he is ever so poor that for months no fire is lighted in his own hearth, and he goes without a full meal for days together. Like a veteran campaigner he can defeat his enemies, fully armed and exceeding his none too well armed battlers, still he is so peace-loving that he has no hesitation in signing a treaty when thousands of his followers are ready to fight till death. He is a man so dauntless that he can set the whole of the Quraysh at defiance, but is also so kind-hearted that he never sheds a drop of blood. He is solicitous of the welfare of his own family, of the weak and the orphan, and of every wayward soul in Arabia; he is always care-worn about the salvation of every human being; but he is also indifferent to everything save the pleasure of his Lord. He never curses those who deride him, nor does he retaliate against those who persecute him; rather, he invokes divine blessings on those who bear malice against him; nevertheless, he never forgives the enemies of God whom he always threaten with grievous punishment in the Hereafter. When we begin to see him as a militant battler, he appears before us as an ascetic in vigils and prayers and when we find him making his debut as a brilliant conqueror, we are astonished to see in him the innocent divine messenger. Just when we want to call him the King of Arabia, we find him leaning on a leather pillow filled with date leaves. The day

we see the booty of war piled up in the courtyard of his Mosque, we find his own family with absolutely nothing to satisfy the pangs of hunger. When we see him distributing the prisoners of war as serfs to the inhabitants of Madeenah, we also see his daughter Fâtimah complaining of blisters on her hands and shoulder caused by driving the hand mill and carrying water. After the half of Arabia submits to his authority, ‘Umar finds him lying on a rough mattress whose weavings have left their marks on his bare body. His house then contains nothing except a handful of oats and a leather jar. His frugal living makes ‘Umar burst into tears, who says: ‘O’ Apostle of God, is it not distressing to see the Qayşars<sup>101</sup> and the Kisras<sup>102</sup> rejoicing in the luxuries of the world while the Messenger of God has to live with these straitened means?’ But he gets reply, ‘ ‘Umar, would you not like that the Qayşar and the Kisra should choose this world and I the next?’ ”

On the day Makkah fell to the arms of the Prophet, Abu Sufiyân, the chief of Makkah and the greatest enemy of Islam till recently, stood watching the stepping-in Muslim troops, waves after waves, with their tribal colours flying over their heads. Abu Sufiyân got overawed and said to ‘Abbas standing beside him: “ ‘Abbas, your nephew has risen to be a great king!” “No”, replied ‘Abbas, “not a king but a Prophet.”

‘Adi, the son of Hâtîm, the famous chief of the tribe of Tay, was still a Christian when he called upon the Prophet (bpuh) in Madeenah for the second time. He saw, on the one hand, the deference paid to the Prophet by his devoted Companions and, on the other, the preparations being made for the holy war. Unable to decide whether Muhammad was a prophet or a king, he was still in two

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<sup>101</sup> Caesars, the emperors of Byzantium.

<sup>102</sup> Chosroes, the emperors of Iran.

minds when he saw a slave girl coming to seek the Prophet's advice in private. "Come on", he heard the Prophet (bpuh) replying, "I'll go wherever you want," 'Adi at once saw that no king could be so modest and unassuming. He threw away the cross hanging from his neck and embraced Islam.

The instances just related are not mere fictions but actual facts. Only a character so comprehensive, so sweeping as to encompass the present and the future, the east and the west and all the diverse situations of human life can provide light and guidance to all classes and groups of human beings. A great teacher is he who can illustrate right behaviour in the fit of anger as well as on occasions demanding merciful charity; who can tell us how to be generous in adversity and brave and courageous in the state of helplessness; who can provide us with a practical example of being a man of the world as well as God-fearing; and, who can give us the good tidings of both the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Earth at one and the same time.

There may be people who might hold forgiveness and kindness to be the greatest of virtues. These two, in their opinion, are enough to attain the perfection of spirit; but can anybody assert that man has no other moral affection, feeling and emotion? Do not emotions like anger, charity, love, hatred, greed, contentment, retaliation and forbearance play any part in shaping human behaviour? He alone can claim to be a perfect guide who can tell us how to keep a happy mean between all these natural propensities. If anybody still persists that sublimity of prophetic character consists merely of kindness, charity and forgiveness, let him also tell the world how long the followers of such a prophet were able to follow the example of their mentor? Innumerable Christian kings have wielded the sceptre from Constantine to this day, but why could nobody ever enforce the teachings of his Saviour as the law of the land? How can, then, the conduct of the prophet not followed by his

own followers be recognized as a perfect norm to be followed by others?

Every prophet of God came to guide us with some distinguishing feature of his own. Noah's life presents the picture of righteous indignation against heathenism while Abraham is the iconoclasm's fugleman. Moses is the matrix of war, government and legislation; Jesus is the specimen of humility and charity, forgiveness and contentment; Solomon is the symbol of royal splendour; John is an illustration of penitence and contrition; Joseph displays the zeal for preaching the truth even in the dungeon; David's Psalms sing of lamentation and God's glorification; Jacob is the mirror of absolute reliance and resignation to the Will of God; but, all these characteristics have been rolled into one perfect model for the entire humanity in the life and character of Muhammad (bpuh). A tradition, although not very authentic, related by Khateeb Baghdadi says that when Muhammad was born a celestial voice was heard commanding the angels: "Take Muhammad from one land to another and to the depth of the ocean so that the whole world, every man and jinn, every beast and bird and every sentient being may know his name and fame. Give him the morals of Adam, gnosis of Seth, courage of Noah, faithfulness of Abraham, eloquence of Ishmael, resignation of Isaac, oratory of Salih, wisdom of Lot, perseverance of Moses, endurance of Job, obedience of Jonah, fighting spirit of Joshua, melody of David, love of Danial, esteem of Elias, chastity of John and abstinence of Jesus (may peace be upon them all) and bathe him in the water of their morals." The writer who have quoted this tradition intended only to emphasise the comprehensiveness of Muhammad's character. This tradition illustrates the engaging qualities granted individually to each prophet of God, but which were ultimately united in the person of the last and the most winsome amongst all of them.

The different aspects the Prophet's life clearly indicate the comprehensiveness of his character. If you behold the Prophet migrating from Makkah to Yathrib (Madenah), your mind's eye would surely recall Moses running away from Egypt to Median. The anchorite meditating in the cave of Ḥirā' had all the earmarks of the mendicant on Mount Sinai. The only difference between the two, if there was any, lay in the wakeful eyes of Moses and meditating mind of Muhammad; the one had fixed his gaze on the exterior while the other was concentrating on the inner core of Ultimate Reality. Mark the striking similarity between the preacher summoning the Quraysh on Mount Ṣafā and the sermonizer on the Mount of Olives. Behold the resemblance between the Commander of the faithful on the planes of Badr and Ḥunayn, Aḥzāb and Tabook and the Prophet leading the Israelites. The Prophet foretelling the doom of the seven Makkan chiefs had the very appearance of Moses cursing Pharaoh and his partisans who had rejected him after witnessing his miracles; but when Muhammad raised his hands to invoke blessings on his enemies at Uḥud, he bore a striking resemblance to Jesus seeking prosperity of his foes, Were you to behold Muhammad (bpuh) acting as a judge in the Mosque at Madenah or fighting the infidels, he would appear to have all the features of Moses, but when you rivet your eyes upon him engaged in night long prayers and vigils, you would have a glimpse of Jesus. If you hear him reciting the Qur'an and glorifying the Lord, you would undoubtedly take him much the same as David singing the Psalms; if you bring to your mind his triumphant entry into Makkah, you would see him very like Solomon, and if you picture him in the confinement of Sh'eb Abi Ṭālib, you would find the very image of Joseph languishing in the Egyptian prison.

Moses brought the law that binds the Israelites, David sang the praises and hymns of God and Jesus illustrated piety and sound

morality but Muhammad combined all — the law-giver, the pious worshipper and the paradigm of moral virtues. In words and letter, they all are described in the Qur'an: in action, the character of Muhammad presents a prefect and practical example of all of them.

There is yet another aspect of Muhammad's all embracing character. Let it be illustrated by the two types of educational institutions found nowadays; first, the specialized college imparting instruction in technical and professional courses, and, secondly, the Universities which cover all the different branches of learning. The institutions of the first category, viz. colleges for the teaching of medical sciences, engineering, commerce, agriculture, law or military science turn out specialists in only one branch, like the physicians, engineers, business executives, agricultural experts, etc. This is because the students taking admission to them are trained in only one branch of knowledge. It is, however, obvious that expertise in any one branch of knowledge, trade or calling is not adequate to meet the various needs of society which needs all the different types of specialized vocations for its progress and balanced development. Were all of us to study a particular art or science and devote ourselves to the same pursuit, the world would come to a standstill, signalling the breakdown of society. Thus, if all men were to become pious ascetics devoted to God, the human society would lose its social order instead of achieving perfection. Now let us judge the prophets by this standard.

"Wherefor you shall know the tree by its fruits,"<sup>103</sup> is a too well known saying of Jesus. Likewise, the academies and their standards of education are known by their alumni. Now, if you direct your mind upon those academies whose revered teacher were the prophets of God, you would find normally ten to twenty learners,

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<sup>103</sup> Mt. 7:16.

occasionally the number rising to seventy, or a hundred, or a thousand disciples, but never exceeding ten or twenty thousand at the most. But, when you come to the last prophetic school you would see more than a hundred thousand pupils around the great mentor. If you go further, and try to find out who the schoolmen of earlier prophets were, where they lived and what they did, what their attainments, morals and character were and what improvement they brought about in the human society of their times, you are more likely than not to get any answer to these questions. In the case of the last Prophet, however, you will find the name and addresses, characters and achievements of all his disciples preserved in the pages of history. Likewise, all the religions lay a claim to the universality of their teachings without any barrier of nationality and country. But the claim can be accepted if it can be shown that the founders of those religions actually enlisted disciples belonging to other nations and races or they even invited those people to join their company irrespective of colour and race and language, or that a few persons belonging to an alien people responded to their call. No prophet of the Old Testament invited any people beyond the borders of Iraq, Syria and Egypt. In other words, the call of all the Israelite prophets was confined to the countries where they lived, or, to be more specific, their whole endeavour was limited to the guidance of the Children of Israel. So was the case with the ancient prophets of Arabia. Jesus Christ slammed the doors of his seminary against the face of alien races, for he unequivocally proclaimed: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."<sup>104</sup> He did not even consider it "meet to take the children's bread and cast *it* to dogs,"<sup>105</sup> by preaching his Gospel to the non-Israelites. The great sages of Hinduism would have perhaps ever thought of diffusing their

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<sup>104</sup> Mt. 15:24.

<sup>105</sup> Mt. 15:26.

teachings beyond the sacred land of Aryaverta.<sup>106</sup> Some of the Buddhist kings, undoubtedly, sent missionaries to other countries but we do not find anything of the kind in the life of the Buddha himself.

Let us now look towards the Alma Mater of unlettered teacher of Arabia. Who are the disciples here? They are Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Ali, 'Uthmân, Ṭalhah and Zubayr belonging to the Quraysh of Makkah; Abu Dharr and Anas come of the Ghifârî tribe living in Ṭahâmah near Makkah; Abu Hurayrah and Abu Ṭufayl ibn 'Amr hail from Yemen and belong to the tribe 'Aws; two more, Abu Moosa al-Ash'ari and Mu'âdh ibn Jabal are from another tribe of Yemen; Dammad ibn Thalba comes of the tribe of Azd; Banu Tamim, another tribe, is represented by Khabbâb ibn al-Araṭṭ; Munqidh ibn Ḥabbân and Mundhir ibn Âidh are the children of Banu 'Abd al-Qays, a tribe of Bahrain; 'Ubayd and Ja'far are the chiefs of Oman; and Farwah ibn 'Amr is from Ma'ân near Syria. And, who is this Negro? He is Bilâl from Abyssinia. Here are also Ṣuhayb, the Roman; Salmân, the Persian; Fayrooz from Daylama; and Sunjit and Markabud from Iran.

The treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyah, signed in 6 A.H./627 A.C. marks the beginning of an era of peace long cherished by Islam. Quraysh and the Muslims agreed not to attack one another and the right to the Muslims to preach their faith was recognized by the Makkans. What was the pursuit to which the Prophet applied himself after securing peaceful conditions? He sent letters to the rulers, kings and emperors of adjoining countries inviting them to join their faith in the Unity of God. Dihya ibn Khaleefa al-Kalbi took his letter to Caesar, who was Heraclius, King of Rome; 'Abdullâh ibn Ḥudhâfah as-Sahmi went with credentials to Chosroes of Iran; Ḥâtib ibn Abu Balta'ah to the Muqawqis, ruler of Alexandria; 'Amr ibn Umayyah to Nagus, the King of Abyssinia; Shujâ' ibn Wahb al-Asadi to Ḥârith ibn Abu

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<sup>106</sup> Land of the Aryans, i.e. in India.

Shimr al-Ghassâni, the lord of Syria; and Şaliṭ ibn ‘Amr to the chiefs of Yamâmah.

The letter sent by the Prophet of Islam, unique in the history of religions, furnish a conclusive evidence, if one were needed, that Islam recognizes no barriers in inviting humanity to its creed. It was meant, from the very first day, for the whole world, for every man belonging to any family, tribe or country and speaking any language.

Let us now see if this seat of learning at Madeenah resembled the institution offering only one course of study, like those of the earlier prophets, or it was like a University which turns out specialists in varied subjects fitted for different jobs and vocations. But, before we proceed further, let us have a look at the training institute of Moses. You would find here only men-at-arms and a few commanders like Joshua besides some priests and judges. Try to find out the disciples of Jesus, and you would see a few mendicants wandering in the by-lanes of Palestine. But here, in the theological seminary of Madeenah, you would find al-Ash‘am, the Nagus of Abyssinia; Farwah, the governor of Ma‘ân; Dhul Kal‘a, the head of Ḥimyar, ‘Amir ibn Shahar, the prince of Hamadân, Fayrooz ad-Daylami and Markabood, the governors of Yemen; and ‘Ubayd and Ja‘far, the chieftains of Oman. You would also see, among the disciples of Muhammad, a number of serfs like Bilâl, Yâsir, Shu‘ayb, Khabbâb, ‘Ammâr and Abu Fukayaha as well as slave girls like Samiya, Labina, Zanirah, Naḥdiyya and Umm Abis rubbing their shoulder with blue-blooded aristocracy of Arabia.

Those who graduated from this University included men of wisdom and master spirits of the age who ruled over nations and countries. They include Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quḥâfa, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb, ‘Uthmân ibn ‘Affân and ‘Ali ibn Abi Ṭâlib. There was also Mu‘âwiyah ibn Abu Sufiyân who held in his hands the reins of all the lands from Africa in the west to the border of India in the east. They

proved themselves such ideal rulers as never seen by the world before or after them: their administration threw into shade the greatest kingdom of all times and their rules of justice eclipsed the Roman and Iranian legal systems.

This institution produced great generals like Khâlid ibn Waleed, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqâs, Abu 'Ubaydah ibn Jarrâh and 'Amr ibn Abi al-Âş who overthrew the two despotic empires of the east and the west in a few years. They became great conquerors whose exploits are still admired with amazement. Sa'd snatched the crowns of Iraq and Iran; Khâlid and Abu 'Ubaydah turned out the Byzantines from Syria, restoring the land of Abraham to its rightful owner; 'Amr ibn al-Âş swooped down upon the ancient land of Pharaoh; while 'Abdullâh ibn Zubayr and Ibn Abi Sarâh swept out the enemy from North Africa. Their conquests demonstrate their military genius which has few parallels in the history of the world.

There were successful administrators and governors also among the alumni of this prophetic school. Bazân ibn Sasân ruled over Yemen, Khâlid ibn Sa'eed over Sana, Muhâjir ibn 'Ummiyah over Kindah, Zayd ibn Waleed over Ḥaḍrmawt, 'Amr ibn Ḥazm over Najrân, Yazeed ibn Abu Sufiyân over Taymâ and 'Alâ' ibn al-Ḥaḍrami over Bahrain besides scores of others exercising authority over populous countries.

The learners of this institute have also excelled as scholars and legists. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb, 'Ali ibn Abi Tâlib, 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs, 'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ood, 'Abdullâh ibn 'Amr ibn al-Âş, 'Â'ishah, Umm Salamah, Abi ibn K'ab, Mu'âdh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thâbit and Ibn az-Zubayr are some of the illustrious legists who laid the foundation of Islamic jurisprudence. They can, verily, be compared with the greatest legislators of the world.

Biographers and chroniclers are also to be seen among the inceptors of this prophetic school. Abu Hurayrah, Abu Moosa al-Ash'âri, Anas ibn Mâlik, Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri, 'Ibâdah ibn as-Şâmit, Jâbir ibn 'Abdullâh and al-Barâ' ibn 'Âzib are amongst hundreds others who narrated and recorded all the details of Islamic faith and practice as well as the events and occurrences of the life of the Prophet (bpuh).

Here we also find a batch of studious learners, indifferent to every other pursuit that attracts the attention of men, having no other place to live save the Mosque of the Prophet. They are seventy in number, devoting themselves wholly to prayers and orisons and learning all about the faith from the great teacher.

This does not, in any case, exhaust the list of the students of this institute, nor their achievements. There is Abu Dharr, a man so truthful that the world would have hardly seen one like him. Disregardful of the world and all that it stands for, he never keeps with him provisions for the morrow. He gets the title of the Christ of Islam from his mentor for his truthfulness and piety. Salmân, the Persian, is another disciple, who is the very picture of piety and devotion. Yet another pious soul, 'Abdullâh ibn 'Umar can also be seen here who spends thirty years of his life in the service of his faith, but when he is asked to take the reins of the then world's largest empire in his hands, he gives his consent on the condition that he will abdicate if even a drop of Muslim's blood is shed during his regime. Muş'ab ibn 'Umayr was the smart chic, always dressed in silk and brocade, but after he accepted Islam he was ever seen in patched garments of coarse cloth. When he dies he has not a cloak long enough to cover him from head to foot and his foot has to be covered with grass. There is also 'Uthmân ibn Ma'dhoon, a mystic of pre-Islamic days. Muhammad ibn Salamah is yet another disciple who declares: "Were a Muslim to enter my room to kill me, I would not

attack him.” Here is also Abu ad-Dardâ’ ever spending his days in fasts and nights in prayers.

The trainees of this institution include men of wisdom, such as, Ṭalḥah, az-Zubayr, al-Mugheerah, Miqdâd, Sa’d ibn Mu’âdh, Sa’d ibn ‘Ubâdah, ‘Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr, As‘ad ibn Zarrah, ‘Abdur-Raḥmân ibn ‘Awf and Sa’d ibn az-Zubayr. They come from the businessmen of Makkah and the farmers of Madeenah but everyone of them proved his worth as a capable administrator, a statesman or a prosperous businessman.

Another group of men we come across here are those who gave their life for their faith but never thought of retracing their steps. Halâ, son of Khadeejah from her former husband was minced by infidels; Sumayyah, the mother of ‘Ammâr died of the injury inflicted by Abu Jahl; Yâsir was cruelly tortured on the rack to die a violent death; Khubayb was crucified; Zayd welcomed death by bowing his head before the assassin’s scimitar; Haram ibn Milḥân and his seventy companions were treacherously done to death at Bir Ma’oona by the trines of Usayya, R‘il and Dhakwân; ‘Âṣim was slain with seven others at ar-Rajî’ by Banu Hudhayl; the blood of Ibn Abi al-Awja and his forty-nine companions was shed by Banu Saleem in 7 A.H./628A.D.; Ka’b ibn ‘Umar Ghifârî and his friends were massacred in the plain of Dhât al-Atl’a but the martyrs never strayed from the path of truth they had discovered at the feet of their teacher. A well-known religion flatters itself of the crucifixion of a single man, but how many martyrs were there among the learners of this school of Madeenah?

Life is lost only once whether it be taken by the blade or the sword, or the head of the spear, or the hangman’s rope. But, greater was the endurance of those who had to bear persecution for years: those who were made to lie on the burning charcoal and the hot sands of Arabia, the men on whose chests were placed heavy rocks and

those who were dragged around by the rope tied round their necks. They were asked to deny Muhammad (bpuh) and his God, but nothing save the sound of, 'One, One' came out of their throats. During the period of boycott imposed by the Quraysh on the Muslims, the Prophet and his kinsmen had very often absolutely nothing save the leaves of trees to fill their bellies for days together. Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqâs relates that once he happened to lay his hands on a piece of dry hide which he roasted and took with water. 'Utbah ibn Ghazwân says that seven of his friends had developed sores in their mouths by taking these unnatural things. When Khabbâb ibn al-Araṭṭ embraced Islam he was forced to lie flat on the burning charcoal until the fire cooled down under him. Bilâl was regularly thrown on his back in the hottest season of the Arabian desert and then a treat rock used to be placed on his chest. He was often dragged around by the rope put round his neck. Abu Fukayha was very often tied by his legs and pulled along, throttled and a heavy rock so big was placed on his chest that his tongue used to come out. 'Ammâr was frequently forced to lie down on burning sand and beaten mercilessly. Zubayr was rolled up in a mat by his uncle and made to inhale smoke. Sa'eed ibn Zayd was too often bound with ropes and beaten, and so was tortured 'Uthmân by his uncle. But none recanted, none repented, nor anybody ever forsook the faith once accepted by him. They were all surely possessed by the truth that never gives way to falsehood.

Is it not surprising that the unlettered and uncultured, rude and savage Bedouins, worshippers of idols and fetish, were turned into wise and polite, cultured and sagacious people by one of them, who was as unlettered as any of them? How could the unarmed Prophet make commanders and generals of them? How did they get the reservoir of courage and intrepidity through a man who was himself helpless and defenceless? How were the people who had never bowed their heads before God, made reverent worshippers, pious and

godly? You have just had a glimpse of Muhammad's great seminary and its learners of various categories: scholars, legists, warriors, judges and rulers. They included the poor as well as the rich, slaves as well as masters and combatants as well as martyrs. Have you not reached the conclusion that here was that superman, Muhammad (bpuh), the emblem of perfection, whose virtues were reflected, in different shades and colours, in his Companions and disciples? It was the Prophet's sagacity which showed its face in Abu Bakr and 'Uthmân; his intrepidity found expression in Khâlid and Abu 'Ubaydah, Sa'd and Ja'far at-Ṭayyâr; his devotion, piety and prayer illuminated the arch and pulpit in the form of Ibn 'Umar, Abu Darr, Salmân and Abu Dardâ'; his knowledge and learning brightened the minds of Ibn 'Abbâs, Ubayy ibn K'ab, Zayd ibn Thâbit and 'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ood; and his patience displayed itself in the perseverance of Bilâl and Şuhayb, 'Ammâr and Khubayb. Like the glorious lamp of heaven Muhammad (bpuh) illumined every nook and corner of the world, the peaks of mountains, sandy deserts, running streams and verdant pastures; his were the streams of rain showering life and vitality over all lands and peoples, which helped all nations to blossom out its latent qualities.

Regardless of the varied talents and accomplishments of the Prophet's Companions, the feature uniformly conspicuous in all was the sparking spirit of faith. Whether one was rich or poor, a king or a friar, a ruler or the ruled, a judge or a witness, a commander or a cavalier, a teacher or the taught, an ascetic or a trader, a fighter or a martyr, Muhammad's light of love — divine, spirit of selflessness, zeal for sacrifice, sympathy for his fellow beings, and, above all, his ardour for achieving the pleasure of God had made a dent in every heart. Whatever position one occupied and wherever one happened to be, this was the burning emotion that kept all of them restless, irrespective of their differing dispositions and individual traits. Their

God was one, the Qur'an was their common Scripture, they owed allegiance to the same Prophet, bowed their heads in the same direction and the ultimate aim of their endeavour was the same — to make this world a better place for the mankind, to do good to every man, to preach the message of God to one and all and to make the truth triumphant over everything else.

These are but brief glimpses of Muhammad's many-sided and comprehensive character. His diverse qualities are like flowers of different colours and hue. Like the natural phenomena, human character also shows a multifariousness of characteristics, traits, dispositions and capacities. And, for the guidance of all these diverse human characters and characteristics, there can be no comprehensive and everlasting guide and teacher save Muhammad, the last of the prophets of God. This is the reason why God commanded Muhammad to proclaim: ﴿... If you love Allah. Follow me; Allah will love you...﴾. "Follow me", only Muhammad can say, "If you love God, whether you are a soldier or a commander, a teacher or a student, a beggar or a millionaire, a subject or a ruler, a saint or a commoner — for the path of virtue and goodness and righteousness lies only in following my example."

Blessings of God be upon him, his family and his Companions.



## Six

# PRACTICALITY

¶ *V*erily in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example...¶  
(*Qur'an* 33: 21)

How to follow the apostle of God is an important question, though, unfortunately hardly touched upon by the biographers of earlier prophets and founders of religions. In the case of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (bpuh), however, this is the most detailed and illuminating part of his biography. The practical examples set by him are, of a fact, so redolent that they alone would be sufficient to demonstrate his finality of prophethood and leadership of all saints, sages and prophets sent by God for the guidance of human race.

There has never been any dearth of the words of wisdom, couched in sweet and pleasing phrases, but what is lacking is the act and the deed — the deed demonstrating the impressive aphorisms. If one goes through the biographies and writings of religious preceptors, one would find interesting doctrines, engaging parables, elegant discourses and graceful utterances which would undoubtedly be fascinating, but one would labour in vain to discover how these great sages had themselves acted upon their precepts.

Morality is the practical system of human behaviour making a distinction between the right and the wrong. Still, no religious scripture has claimed, like the Qur'an, that the promulgator of its

faith was the best in conduct amongst his followers. But the Qur'an asserts:

﴿Nay, verily for you [O' Muhammad] is a reward unfailing. And Lo! You [stand] on an exalted standard of character.﴾ (*Qur'an* 68: 3-4)

The two verses cited here are coordinative according to their grammatical construction since they imply the inference of one statement from another. The first clause claims a "great reward" for the Prophet, which is abiding also, while the latter gives the reason for it. Unfailing recompense is promised to him because of his sublime nature and character. Such was the Messenger of Allah who had demanded from the people:

﴿... Why say you that which you do not?﴾ (*Qur'an* 61: 2)

The Prophet (bpuh) had a right to ask this question for he always did what he said. Weigh the character of two prophets, just for a comparison, one on the Mount of Olives and the other on the Mount of Şafâ and you would see the difference. One has lofty homilies unaccompanied by any practical example while the other does whatever he preaches. To forgive your enemy after you have gained power and authority over him is noble and virtuous, but the quietism of a weak and helpless person cannot be taken as a proof of his eschewing revenge. One can only lay a claim to negative virtues, say, by not hitting anybody, not killing anyone, not being wrongful, not laying hands on another man's property, not constructing a house for oneself, or not amassing riches. He may have committed none of these wrongs but the question is whether he has helped anyone, saves anyone from being killed or done any good to someone, given away something to the needy, given shelter to someone or distributed alms to the poor and destitute? World needs positive virtues for an act consisting of doing something and not merely abstaining from it. The Qur'an is quite clear on this aspect of Muhammad's Character:

«It was by mercy of Allah that you was lenient with them [O' Muhammad], for if you had been stern and fierce of heart, they would have dispersed from round about you.» (Qur'an 3: 159)

This verse talks about the kind-heartedness of the Prophet (bpuh) and also adduces the proof that “they would have dispersed from round about” him if he had been stern and hardhearted.

Again, the Qur'an says:

«Then has come unto you a Messenger, from amongst yourselves, unto whom aught that you are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful..» (Qur'an 9: 128)

The Qur'an speaks here of the concern of Muhammad for the welfare of entire humanity. God, Almighty informs that the persistence of the unbelievers in their ungodly ways is sure to invite divine wrath, and this is heart-rending to His Apostle. The merciful nature of the Prophet (bpuh) and his ardent desire to save mankind from the impending catastrophe impels him to call the people to the path of righteousness. He is even more kind to those who listen to his call. The revelation, thus, testifies to the kindness of Muhammad for the whole mankind, in general, and to the Muslims; in particular.

This is the testimony of God about the character of Muhammad.

The revelation contained in the Qur'an consists of divine commands which you may call the teachings of Islam. But, the Scripture is also a running commentary on the practical conduct of Muhammad as an Apostle of God. There was not an injunction revealed to him that he did not demonstrate by his own example. He talked about faith, Oneness of God, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, poor-due (zakah), charity, fighting in the way of God, self-sacrifice, determination, perseverance, endurance, thanks giving, virtuous

deeds and morals and demonstrated everyone of these by setting a personal example. It is no exaggeration to claim that his life was an illustration of what one finds written in the Qur'an. Once a few Companions asked 'Â'ishah about the moral virtues of the Prophet. She replied, "Have you not read the Qur'an? His character was the exponent of the Qur'an," says another tradition handed down in the *as-Sunan* of Abu Dawood. The Qur'an contains precepts in words and phrases while Muhammad's life is their practical demonstration.

Nobody can claim to know a man more intimately — about his character, behaviour and disposition — than his own wife. When Muhammad made the claim that he had been bestowed with the mantle of divine apostleship, he had been married to Khadeejah for fifteen years. This was a sufficiently long time for any woman to know her husband to his heart and soul. But, what was the opinion formed by Khadeejah about her husband. The moment he told her about the revelation and his prophethood, Khadeejah accepted his words without the least hesitation. It was the Prophet himself who was a bit perplexed, but she assured him: "Nay, it will not be so, I swear to God. He will never make you melancholy or sad, for you are kind to your relations, you speak the truth, you clear the debts of others, you help the poor, you are hospitable, you assist your fellowmen and you bear the affections of people in distress."<sup>107</sup> Such had been the Prophet's conduct even before he was chosen by God for apostleship.

Of all the wives of the Prophet, one more dearly loved by him after Khadeejah, was 'Â'ishah who had spent nine years of her life with the Prophet. She affirms: "He never spoke ill of anybody. Instead of returning evil for evil, he used to forgive those who gave offence to him. He was always clear of iniquity and never had his revenge. He

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<sup>107</sup> *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhari.*

never hit any maid or slave or servant or even a dumb creature. He never turned down a seemingly request whosoever made it.”

Among the relatives of the Prophet, nobody was closer to him than ‘Ali, who had been with the Prophet from his childhood. He bears witness that, “The Prophet was of cheerful disposition, kind-hearted and had a clear conscience. Warm-hearted and gracious, he was never harsh to anybody nor did he ever cast reflection upon anyone. If he disliked the request made by someone, he normally kept quiet instead of giving a blunt reply or acquiescing to such demands. Those who knew his habit understood what he meant by his silence. He never liked to sadden anybody; rather, he used to set the hearts at ease; he was kind, compassionate.”

‘Ali further adds: “He was benevolent, lavishly generous, truthful and exceedingly kind-hearted. It was a pleasure to have his company. Whoever met him for the first time was filled with awe but with closer contact became attached to him.”<sup>108</sup>

The well-known British historian Gibbon has also expressed almost the same opinion about the character of the Prophet.

Hind, son of Khadeejah from her former husband, says about the Prophet: “Kind of heart, he was nice and sweet-tempered. He never liked to displease or cause offence to anybody. He thanked others even for trifling favours. He took whatever food was placed before him without making any adverse remark. He never got angry for anything concerning his own person, nor did he think of taking revenge or letting down anybody, but if anyone opposed what was just and right, he used to get sore and helped the right cause with all his might.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Tirmidhi.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

These are the testimonies furnished by those who were close to the Prophet (bpuh) and knew him like the back of their hands. How unblemished would have been the character so praised by those who had a long and intimate experience of his conduct and behaviour?

Another aspect of the Prophet's character, which is even more praiseworthy, is that he always practiced what he preached to others.

The Prophet (bpuh) called upon his Companions to develop a deep and abiding affection for God through worship and remembrance, leaving aside the living awareness of God, conspicuous in the life and character of the Prophet's Companions, let us see how far the Prophet himself live up to his teachings? Was there a single moment throughout the day and night when he lost the communion or was forgetful of God? Illuminated by the light-divine that had broken in upon him, he maintained consciousness of the living, loving God whether sitting or walking, eating or drinking, sleeping or waking. A great portion of the hadiths, extant today, consists of his supplications, beseechments and glorification of God, which he used to recite on different occasions. The *Ḥiṣn al-Ḥiṣeen* is a book of two hundred pages containing the implorations which he used to offer from time to time. Every word of these litanies burns and breathes of his unbounded devotion to God and his impassioned admiration for Him since these were embedded deep into his heart. The Qur'an, speaking of the pious and God fearing souls, says:

﴿Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining...﴾<sup>110</sup>

(*Qur'an* 3: 191)

This is how the Prophet (bpuh) spent his life. 'Ā'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) says that he used to be ever engrossed in the remembrance of God.

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<sup>110</sup> *Al-Musnad*, vol. VI, p. 233.

The Prophet enjoined upon his followers to offer prayers, but how did he pay the divine honours himself? He had made the obligatory prayers, five times a day, incumbent on others, but it was his custom to be on his knees eight times every day. Besides the five prayers of *fajr*, *dhuhr*, *‘aṣr*, *maghrib* and *‘ishâ*’, he also offered the prayers of *ishrâq*, after sunrise, *châst* (*Duḥa*’), when the sun had well risen and *tahajjud*, after midnight. These three were voluntary prayers not incumbent on every believer. A man normally performs seventeen *rak‘ahs* (units of prayer) in the five obligatory ones, but the Prophet (bpuh) continued to offer about sixty *rak‘ahs* throughout his life. He never missed even the midnight orisons. He used to stand in prayers for such lengths of time that his legs often got swollen. When ‘Â’ishah once remonstrates with him: “Why do you take all this trouble? God has already redeemed you.” What she got in reply was, “Should I not behave like a thankful servant?” His was not the supplication arising out of fear or awe, but was an expression of his ardent devotion and unbounded love for God, the Glorious. He used to remain bowed before his Lord for spells so long that it appeared as if he had forgotten to move over to prostration.

The Prophet (bpuh) had begun offering prayers from the very beginning of his ministry. The pagans of Makkah detested his way of orison, but he always offered prayers in the Ka‘bah in front of the holy sanctuary. Many a time he was attacked by the disbelievers while he was engaged in prayers, but he never left the practice. It was still more difficult to offer prayers in the din of warfare when the enemy rode full till against his small body of followers, seeking the Prophet to end the dispute forever. But no sooner than the time did arrive for prayers that he was leading the faithful in the service of God. In Badr, when the two armies were arrayed against each other, he hastened to his prayer mat to raise his hands supplicating God for the victory of his ill equipped force. Never was he late in offering the prayers, nor were even two of them missed concurrently. Once, in the

Battle of Trenches, he was not able to say ‘*Asr* prayers owing to the fierce assault by the enemy, and then, on another occasion, he had to offer pre-dawn (*Fajr*) prayers after the sunrise since everybody had fallen asleep after a night-long journey. After the Apostle’s illness had worsened, a few days before his death, he came to the mosque supported by two of his Companions in order not to miss the congregational prayer. When he was unable to get up, towards the fag end of his life’s journey, and was relapsing into swoon, he tried thrice to join the congregation but fell down unconscious after each attempt. This was the way the Prophet showed, by his own example, how one should pay homage to God.

The Prophet commended keeping of fasts throughout the month of Ramaḍân. But, in addition to these, he punctuated every week with a fast or two. “When he took to the keeping of fasts”, says ‘Â’ishah, “It appeared as if he would never give them up.” The Prophet forbade his followers to prolong the voluntary fasts beyond a day at a time, but he himself used to fast continuously for days together without even taking anything during the night. If his Companions tried to emulate him, he dissuaded them saying: “Who amongst you is like me? My Lord provides sustenance to me.” Normally, he kept fast for the whole of two months during Sha‘bân and Ramaḍân, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, the first ten days of Muḥarram, six days following the ‘*Eid al-Fiṭr*, and on Mondays and Thursdays in every week.<sup>111</sup> In this manner did the Prophet teach his follower how to keep fasts.

The Prophet impressed the merit of almsgiving, but he also showed the way to it by his own magnanimous charity. We have mentioned elsewhere how Khadeejah had praised his philanthropy — “You clear the debts of others and help the poor.”

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<sup>111</sup> *Mishkât al-Maṣâbeḥ.*

“Mohammed never asked his followers to forsake their houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and children for his sake”,<sup>112</sup> “nor did he advise them to sell all they had and give the money to the poor”.<sup>113</sup> “He did not even say that it would be very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>114</sup> “Spend of that We have bestowed upon you” was the divine command and the Prophet exhorted to give away a part of one’s earnings in charity as an act of thanksgiving to one’s Lord. But how did he himself act of his precept? He always gave away whatever he had with both hands. Booty of war came laden on camels but he never kept anything for himself or his family. Extremely frugal in his habits, spending days after days without anything to satisfy his hunger — this was the way of living chosen voluntarily by him. After the capture of Khaybar in 7 A.H./628 A.C., his normal practice was to distribute the cereals received after the harvest among his wives for their maintenance. But before the year was over, a large part of it was given away in charity with the result that his household had to live from hand to mouth for several months. “More generous than all of us,” says Ibn ‘Abbâs, “was the Apostle who used to give away freely during the Ramaḍân.” He never said ‘no’ in reply to any request, and never took his food alone. No matter in what small quantity were the victuals available. He invited all those present to partake it with him. He had asked us to inform him if any Muslim died without paying his debts, for he always took the responsibility to repay it. The legacy of the deceased, of course, devolved on his heirs. Once a Bedouin said to him rudely, “All this does not belong to you or your father. Let my camel be loaded with it.” Instead of taking ill to his insolent remark, the Prophet immediately agreed to his suggestion and got his

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<sup>112</sup> Mt. 10:37.

<sup>113</sup> Mt. 19:21.

<sup>114</sup> Mt. 19:23.

dromedary laden with date and oats. He often used to tell his Companions: "I am a trustee charged to apportion everybody's share. Verily, the donor is Allah."

Abu Dharr, a Companion of the Prophet, relates that once he accompanied the Prophet (bpuh) going somewhere at night, when he remarked: "Abu Dharr, if the mount of Uḥud were turned into gold for me, I would not like three nights to pass with a single *dinâr* left in my possession. Of course, that excludes whatever I may keep apart for clearing somebody's debts."

This was not merely a pious wish but the words of a Prophet expressed with the determination to act on his precepts. And he always did act in that manner. A large amount of tithe was once received from Bahrain. The Prophet directed the Companions to store it in the courtyard of the Mosque. Next morning he came to the Mosque for performing his prayers but passed by the heap of treasure without even setting his eyes on it. The prayer ended, and he sat down near the bags distributing the money to one and all. He stood up only after he had given away to the last shell as if it were a filth which he wanted to get rid of as quickly as possible.

Another time cereals loaded on four camels were brought from Fadak, which was meant to meet the requirements of the Prophet's family. A portion of it was first given away in satisfaction of the debt incurred earlier. Then Bilâl was asked by the Prophet to distribute the remainder to the poor and the needy. Bilâl, however, reported after some time that some of it was still left as nobody was available to receive the charity. Extremely perplexed to hear the news the Prophet remarked: "I cannot go to take rest in my house so long as this worldly pelf remains lying here." He spent that night in the mosque and went to this house early next morning when Bilâl told him that the good gracious God had been kind enough to unburden him of his care. The Prophet thanked God before returning to his house, but he

came back, visibly agitated, after a short while. When asked about the reason for his coming back, he replied, "It recurred to my mind that this small piece of gold was also lying in my house. I feared lest the sun should go down again and it remains with me."

Umm Salamah has related another incident, She says: "The Prophet looked sad and melancholy when he came to my house one day. On being asked the reason for it, he said, 'Umm Salamah the seven *dinârs* I had received yesterday are still lying on my bed.' " There is another episode of even greater significance. It is related that when the Prophet's illness took a turn for the worse and he was lying on his bed restless with an splitting pain in his head, he suddenly recalled that a few gold sovereigns received earlier had not been given away. He implored to give away the sovereigns at once with the words: "Shall Muhammad meet his Lord while he had these sovereigns still with him?"

Such was the example of charity set by the holy Prophet.

The Prophet of Islam (bpuh) commended frugal living and contentment. It has been stated earlier that spoils, tithes and poor-dues came to Madeenah laden on pack animals from every nook and corner of the country. But the ruler of Arabia more often had nothing in his house, not even enough to make the two ends meet. 'Â'ishah related after his death: "The Prophet left this world but he never had a full meal twice in a day." She adds that the day he died, she had nothing with her except a handful of oats. His coat of mail had already been pawned with a Jew. He used to say: "Son of Adam has no right to possess anything except a small hut to live, a pair of clothes to wear, simple bread to eat and water to fill his belly." He perhaps alluded to his own way of living in this manner, for, he had a mud house with only one room, thatched with date-leaves and camels' hair. 'Â'ishah says that she never had to keep the Prophet's dresses, meaning thereby that the clothes put on by him were the only

one he had at that time. Once a beggar came to complain that he was hungry. The Prophet sent words to his wives but none had anything to offer except water.

Abu Ṭalḥah relates that once he saw the Prophet lying in the mosque. He was, at the time, hungry and restless. Some of his Companions, on another occasion, complained of hunger to the Prophet and showed him the slab of stone each had tied to his stomach to mitigate the aching void. They found the Prophet still more famished for he had tied two slabs of stones to his stomach. At times his voice showed that he was starving. Another time, when he had had nothing to eat for quite a few days, he went to see Abu Ayyoob al-Anṣārī who immediately brought some fresh dates and got some victuals cooked for him. Before taking anything brought to him, he sent a bread with some meat to Fâṭimah who had also not taken anything for the last two days.

Fâṭimah and her two sons, Ḥassan and Ḥusain, were deeply loved by the Prophet, but he never fondled them with costly clothes and jewellery. Once he saw a gold necklace around the neck of his daughter. He admonished her saying, "Fâṭimah, do you want the people to say that Muhammad's daughter is bedecked with the necklace of fire?" Fâṭimah at once took off the necklace and sold it to liberate a slave with its price. Similarly, on another occasion, he got his beloved wife 'Â'ishah to cast off gold bracelets she had been putting on. The Prophet often used to remark: "Man needs only that much of the world as a wayfarer requires petty cash to meet his urgent needs." This was not a piece of advice meant for others. Some of his Companions who were pained to see the marks of a rough mat on his body, offered to provide him a soft bedding, but he dismissed their suggestion with the remark: "What have I to do with the world? Only that much is lawful for me as a rider going on his errand requires rest under a shady tree."

The entire belongings of the Prophet in 9 A.H./630 A.C., when the frontiers of the Islamic State had extended from Yemen to the borders of Syria, consisted of an undergarment which hung down a few inches below his knees, a rough bedstead, a pillow filled with the bark of date, a handful of barley, a hide-skin and a water pail. This was all he possessed, and such was his contentment with bare subsistence!

Many a preacher can be seen exhorting others to become noble-minded and eschew selfishness, but does any-one himself observe that golden rule? Nevertheless, here is an exalted example of one who preached this lofty ideal not through words but by his deeds. All of us know how Muhammad adored his favourite daughter, Fâtimah, but this very beloved daughter had to live in such reduced circumstances that she had developed blisters through driving the hand mill and drawing water from the well. Distressed and pinched by her privations, she approached her father one day to ask for a maid servant. The reply she got was, "Fâtimah, my daughter, no provision has yet been made for the poor *Ṣuffah* Companions. How can your request be granted?" Another reply ascribed to him is: "The orphans of Badr had made a request before you did."

A Companion presented a shawl to the Prophet at a time when he needed one. A man present on the occasion remarked, "How fine!" The Prophet presented the shawl to him instantly. Another time, a Companion had to celebrate certain function but he had nothing to entertain his guests. The Prophet directed him to go and take a basketful of flour from 'Â'ishah although nothing else was available for his own household on that day. Once he came to 'Â'ishah with his *Ṣuffah* Companions and asked her to bring whatever food was available. A few breads, some soup of dates and a cup of milk were all that was available in his house to entertain the guests. This is how the Prophet taught the lesson of self-denial and

contentment to others.

What endurance and patience is needed to demonstrate one's absolute reliance on God? For a practical example of it we shall have, again, to turn to Muhammad, the Prophet of God. The Lord had commanded the Prophet;

«Then have patience [O' Muhammad] even as the stout of heart among the messengers [of old] had patience...» (*Qur'an* 46: 35)

And, he calmly endured all the hardships and insults heaped upon him by an unmannerly and harsh people. The Makkans, among whom he was born, were uncultured and boorish, arrogant and insolent. Unwilling to hear a word against their deities, they were always ready to kill and be killed rather than countenance disgrace to their idols. But the Prophet cared nothing for their wrath and always went to preach the Oneness of God in the sanctuary of the Ka'bah. This was also the rendezvous of the Makkah's chieftains, but Muhammad had made it a point to prostrate before the Lord, within their sight, without paying any heed to their furious opposition. Then was received the divine command:

«So proclaim that which you are commanded...» (*Qur'an* 15: 94)

We know how Muhammad (bpuh) carried out this command by summoning the whole of Makkah from the summit of Mount Şafâ. The persecution of the lonely Prophet started. They manhandled him, abused and oppressed him, threw rubbish over him, tried to strangle him, sowed thorns in his way, but never did he stop from preaching and publicizing God's religion. When his uncle Abu Tâlib hinted at abandoning him, the inspiring reply he gave to his uncle was: "O' my uncle, by God, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on the condition that I abandon this course, I would not do so until God has made it victorious, or I perish therein."

He was forced to withdraw in the vale of Sh‘eb Abu Tâlib for three long years, nothing reaching him and his family in the confinement. He was exhausted and the children and the old were emaciated by taking leaves of the trees to satisfy their pangs of hunger. At last, the conspiracy was hatched to kill him but he remained firm and unshaken. He took refuge in a cave where he was almost tracked down by the enemy in hot pursuit of the fugitives. His Companion then mumbled in terror: “O’ Apostle of Allah, we are only two here.” The Prophet, however, had ample of patience and faith in God.

﴿... ‘Grieve not’, he replied, ‘Lo! Allah is with us...’﴾ (*Qur’an* 9: 40)

Again, during the same journey when Surâqah got near the two on his horse, Abu Bakr could not help crying out, “O’ Messenger of Allah, we have been caught.” The Prophet was even then serene and calm, chanting the Scripture with full confidence in the succour of his God.

Madeenah was also not safe from danger. Threatened by surprise attack of his former enemies, he had also snakes of his bosom like the Jews and hypocrites of Madeenah. Guards were detailed for keeping night-long vigils but, then, the revelation was received; perhaps, again, to demonstrate what faith in God meant to the Prophet:

﴿... Allah will protect you from mankind...﴾ (*Qur’an* 5: 67),

— assured the Lord, and he promptly came out to ask the guards to go away and take rest since God’s protection was enough for him.

On his return from the expedition to Najd, The Prophet (bpuh) was taking rest under a tree. No companion was near him. A Bedouin came forward with an unsheathed sword in hand and demanded from the Prophet: “Muhammad, who can now save you from me?” The Prophet’s sleep was disturbed, he opened his eyes and said calmly: “Allah.” The reply so reassuring, so full of trust in God that the

enemy put his sword back in the scabbard!

The same was the story at Badr also. One thousand well-armed Makkans were *locked* in battle against three hundred Muslims not all of whom were under arms. But where was the commander of these three hundred empty-handed soldiers? Away in a corner of the battlefield, he could be seen bowing and prostrating and lifting his hands in prayer. “O’ God,” he was entreating, “if they are destroyed today, You will be worshipped no more.”

There were also occasions when the Muslims had to suffer a defeat. They were, at time, so overwhelmed by the charging enemy that they had to run for their lives but the one who had absolute trust in God, stood firm at his place like a rock. At Uḥud the Muslim forces were put to flight and the enemy slew many of them. The Prophet, however, stuck to his place. He was hit by a stone, fell on his side and one of his teeth was smashed; his face was scarred, his lips were injured and blood smeared his face. Still, he did not unsheathe his sword, for he was confident of the help of his Lord. Again, in the battle of Ḥunayn, when the Muslims were terrified by a sudden attack and took to their heels none heeding the other, the Apostle dismounted from his dromedary and called out: “Where are you going men? Come to me. I am God’s Apostle. I am Muhammad, the son of ‘Abdullāh.”

Is there any other commander who holds fast to his post in the battlefield even after his army takes to flight? Who neither takes to the sword nor loses his heart but remains firm in his faith in God! Who Does not forget even in such a precarious situation to beseech the help of God for Granting him victory. Such was the heroism and the fortitude and the faith of Muhammad since he had to set an example for those who fight solely for the sake of God.

You would have heard the preachment “Love thy enemy”, but would have never seen how the enemy is loved? It is not necessary to present here the hardships undergone by the Prophet at Makkah where he was persecuted and helpless, for it is no use making a virtue of necessity. When Muhammad was migrating to Madeenah, the pagan chiefs of Makkah had set a reward of hundred camels for capturing him alive or dead. Surâqah ibn Mâlik ibn Ju’shum took to his horse in pursuit of the Prophet, thrice did he cast his divining arrows and thrice he got the reply: “Do him no harm.” He refused to be put off and went ahead but, Lo! thrice his horse stumbled, its forelegs went into the ground, throwing him away from the horseback. He then came to the conclusion that the Prophet (bpuh) was protected against him and would have the upper hand. Psychologically speaking, he had lost his nerves. He decided to turn back, but before doing so he called out to the Prophet requesting to write him a document of safety for the day when he would gain victory over Makkans. The document was promptly given to him. Surâqah embraced Islam after Makkah was captured. When he came to see the Prophet, the latter did not even ask Surâqah why he had gone in pursuit of him on the behest of his enemies.

You know Abu Sufiyân alright. He was the leader of the Quraysh in the battles of Badr, Uḥud and Trenches, to name but a few. How many Muslims were killed because of him and how many times had he tried to root out Islam and kill the Prophet? He was such an arch enemy of Islam that when he came to see the Prophet, just before the conquest of Makkah, along with ‘Abbas, all those who were present on the occasion recommended to kill him. But Abu Sufiyân was confident in his heart of heart that Muhammad (bpuh) would never take revenge. And, he was right, for Muhammad not only forgave him but also allowed him to proclaim that whoever would enter his house in Makkah would be safe against the assault of

the invading army.<sup>115</sup>

Hind, the wife of Abu Sufiyân had been present in the battle of Badr inciting the pagans of mecca to fight to the last against Muslims. In the battle of Uḥud she had cut off the ears and noses of Muslim martyrs to make anklets and collars. She had cut out the liver of the Prophet's uncle Hamza and chewed it and so mutilated his dead body that the Prophet was sickened to see it. After the capture of Makkah she came veiled in disguise to accept Islam, but was still insolent in her replies to the questions asked by the Apostle of God. She was, nevertheless, forgiven without being asked to explain her previous conduct. Astonished by the remarkable mercy of the Prophet, Hind exclaimed: "Muhammad, no tent I hated aforetime more than yours, but none is now dearer to me than your pavilion."<sup>116</sup>

Waḥshi had killed Ḥamza in the battle of Uḥud. When Makkah was conquered, he fled to Ṭā'if, but when Ṭā'if also surrendered, he was in an impasse but someone said to him, "Good heavens, what is the matter? He does not kill anyone who enters his religion. You cannot get peace anywhere except in his company." He came back to seek forgiveness. The Prophet recalled the mutilated corpse of his uncle on seeing Waḥshi, but condoned his crime. He simply said: "Hide your face from me and never let me see you again."<sup>117</sup>

'Ikrimah was the son of Abu Jahl, the worst enemy of the Prophet. He hated Islam like his father and had fought against the Muslims on several occasions. After Makkah was occupied by Muslims, he reflected over his past crimes and thought it wise to leave for Yemen. His wife, Umm Ḥakeem, embraced Islam and repaired to Yemen to console him and to bring him back to Makkah.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 548.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 553.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

As soon as the news of his arrival was received, the Apostle got up so hurriedly that his shawl fell from his shoulders. He hailed 'Ikrimah with the words: "Welcome to you, O' émigré rider." 'Ikrimah's father had been the leader of persecutors, and had caused the Prophet untold miseries. Was rubbish not thrown by Abu Jahl over the Prophet and had he not conspired to kill him? Had he not led the infidels against Muslims at Badr and rejected every counsel of peace with the Muslims? But now, his son was received with open arms to tell the world that the enemy is loved in this wise!<sup>118</sup>

There was another man, Ḥabbar ibn al-Aswad by name, who was responsible for the death of Muhammad's daughter, Zaynab. He was one of those few heartless criminals who had been condemned after the conquest of Makkah. He wanted, at first, to go away to Iran, but on reconsideration went straight to the Prophet (bpuh) and confessed his guilt. "I wanted to leave for Iran," said he, "but looking back to your clemency I have come to you, O' Prophet of God. The reports you have received about me are all correct." Confession of Ḥabbar so softened the heart of the merciful Apostle that he forgave him instantly forgetting even the death of his own daughter!

'Umayr ibn Wahb was another leader of the Quraysh of Makkah. Shortly after the battle of Badr he sharpened his sword and smeared it with poison, and went off to Madeenah to seek his revenge from the Prophet. He was seen entering the mosque and was taken prisoner. His guilt was proved, but the soft-hearted Prophet allowed him to depart in freedom. 'Umayr had agreed to kill the Prophet on the promise of another chief, Safwân ibn Umayyah, who had undertaken to discharge his debts and to support his family. After Makkah had fallen to the Muslims, Safwân fled to Jeddah to take a ship for Yemen. 'Umayr, however, told the Prophet that Safwân was

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<sup>118</sup> Op.cit., p. 551.

the chief of his people, who had run away to cast himself into the sea. The Prophet was so moved by the plight of his former enemy that he granted him immunity. On ‘Umayr’s request for a sign to prove it to Safwân, the Prophet gave him his turban with which he had entered Makkah. ‘Umayr overtook Safwân before he could embark the ship and begged him to return with him. Safwân was not agreeable, however. He said: “I go in fear of my life because of Muhammad.” But ‘Umayr who was not very long ago after the blood of the Prophet replied: “He is too clement and too honourable to kill you.” At last Safwân returned and asked the Prophet: “I have been told that you have granted me immunity. Is it correct?” When the Prophet replied in affirmative, Safwân asked for two months in which to make up his mind, and the Prophet gave him four months to decide. But four months was a pretty long time in the company of the merciful Prophet, Safwân accepted Islam well before the time was up.<sup>119</sup>

When the Prophet led an expedition to Khaybar, the stronghold of the Jews, and captured the city after a fierce battle, a Jewess brought a roasted lamb poisoned by her to kill the Prophet. After chewing a morsel of the meat the Prophet came to know of the poison and asked to produce the woman before him. She confessed what she had done, but the Prophet let her off although he suffered from the toxic effect of the food brought by her for the rest of his life.<sup>120</sup>

On yet another occasion, a disbeliever was apprehended on the charge of lying in wait to kill the Prophet. He was in a flutter, when he was produced before the Prophet, because of fear but the Prophet consoled him saying: “Don’t fear. You could not have killed me, even if you wanted to do so.”

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<sup>119</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 555.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 516.

A band of eighty warriors was rounded up just before the capture of Makkah. It wanted to bear down upon the Prophet (bpuh), but was let off by the merciful Apostle of God.

You would have surely heard of Ṭā'if. It was the city which had refused to grant asylum to the persecuted Prophet. It had declined even to listen to him. Here it was that encouraged by 'Abdu Yâleel, its chief, the touts and slaves had insulted and shouted and pelted stones on the Apostle until his shoes were filled with his blood; and when he had sat down tired and broken-hearted to take some rest, the touts had compelled him to move along amidst their missiles. How could the Prophet forget the sufferings of Ṭā'if, for it was the worst torments he had to endure in his whole life. In 7 A.H./628 A.C., the Muslim army had laid a siege of Ṭā'if but it had to retire after suffering a loss, since the wall of the city could neither be scaled nor gave way to the besiegers. The Muslims who did not want to raise the siege without reducing the city begged the Prophet to curse the people of Ṭā'if. But, when he raised up his hands in prayer, he was heard not cursing the people of Ṭā'if but invoking blessings for them. "O' God, guide the people of Ṭā'if and make them accept Your religion," was the prayer sent up by the merciful apostle of God.

In the battle of Uḥud when the Muslim were put to flight and the enemy tried to get at the Prophet, he was hit by a stone which smashed one of his teeth, his face was scarred and his lip was injured. The Prophet's incisor was broken and blood began to run down his face. He wiped the blood saying the while: "How can a people prosper who have stained their Prophet's face with blood while he summoned them to their Lord? O' God, show them the right path for they know it not." This was the practical example of loving one's enemy. It demanded putting one's life at stake rather than preaching a high flown dictum to the peaceful crowd.

We have mentioned ‘Abdu Yâleel, the cruel-hearted chief of Ṭâ’if. When he ultimately came to Madeenah, the Prophet got a tent pitched for him within the sacred mosque. He had parleys with ‘Abdu Yâleel, after the night prayers were over, and told him about the hardships undergone at Ṭâ’if. The love and respect accorded to the former enemy was yet another example of loving one’s enemy not through words but by deeds.<sup>121</sup>

When Makkah fell to the arms of the Prophet all the chief of the city assembled in the courtyard of Ka’bah. This was the place where the Prophet had once been insulted and beaten, where conferences of the elders of Makkah used to be held for doing away with him, and the persons present were those who had persistently denied and opposed him. They were the persons who had poked fun at him, pelted stones upon him, sown thorns in his way, tortured and killed the helpless believers instigated the whole of Arabia to destroy the Prophet and his faith. On that day they all stood as criminals, conscious of their guilts, surrounded by ten thousand well-armed warriors ever willing to square the past accounts with them. At last the Prophet broke silence and asked: “O’ Quraysh what do you think that I am about to do with you?” “Good, Muhammad”, they replied, “You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother.” The Prophet (bpuh) then gave his verdict: “Go your way for you are the freed ones.”<sup>122</sup> This is how the enemy is loved and forgiven — a shining example without any parallel in the annals of the world. One has not to indulge in rhetoric and high sounding words to teach a lesson, but to wade through blood and tears for setting a noble example.

It should now be clear why Islam invites us to follow not merely the injunctions of its Scripture but also demand to take after

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<sup>121</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 615.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p. 553.

the example of the Messenger of divine Scripture. If other religions only ask to comply with the teachings of their founders, it is because they do not have any living model of their preceptors. The Prophet of God (bpuh) had told his followers a few days before he departed from this world.

“I have left you two things, and you will not go astray as long as you hold these fast. The one is the Book of God and the other is my own way.”

These are the two lighthouses of guidance still pointing out the way to virtue and goodness, and so shall they remain to the end of time.

﴿Verily in the messenger of Allah you have a good example...﴾  
(*Qur'an* 33: 21)

— says the Lord to ratify the Apostle's dictum.

Islam, thus, presents the practical example of its Prophet in support of its teachings, and this is its distinguishing feature amongst the religions of the world. It does not merely say, “Offer prayers,” but also asks its Prophet to exhort, “Offer prayers as you see me praying.” Similarly, the Prophet directs his followers: “The best amongst you is he who is good to his wife and children, and I am the best of all in being good to my wife and children.” Take another example. During the last Ḥajj — Ḥajj of farewell — the Prophet has a hundred thousand believers round him. He intends to convey the message of God, the Principles of Peace and Justice and human brotherhood; but he does not forget to illustrate everything he wants to preach by his own example. He says:

“All the blood shed in the pagan past of Arabia is to be left unavenged. The first claim on blood I abolish is that of my own nephew, the son of Rabee‘ah ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Abdul-Muṭṭalib. All

the usurious transactions are abolished this day and I abolish first of all the claims of my uncle ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abdul-Muṭṭalib.”

Security of life and property of the individuals is the basic need of every civilized society. Next comes, honour which more often than not means acting in accordance with the prevalent customs, rites and etiquettes of the society. To abolish any customs, even stale and useless, is to incur disgrace in the eyes of one’s compatriots. For a shame is attached to the discontinuance of time-honoured customs even the greatest reformers have often found it difficult to mark a total break with the social usages and conventions. But, what is the record of Muhammad (bpuh) in this regard? Slaves were accorded the lowest place in pre-Islamic Arab society. The Arabs were so conscious of the nobility of blood and race that they even deemed it a dishonour to fight an enemy unequal to them in social standing — it was shameful to stain one’s sword with the blood of a low-born man. This was the mood and temper of Arab society when the Prophet declared:

“Lo! You are all children of Adam and Adam was created of clay. The blacks have no precedence over the whites nor the whites over blacks: Arabs enjoy no superiority over non-Arabs nor the non-Arabs over Arabs. The best amongst you is the one who is more pious, God-fearing.”

This declaration brought all, the high and the low, the master and the slave on an equal plan, but it had to be accompanied by a striking example to catch the imagination of the people. Allah’s Messenger, therefore, declared his slave to be his adopted son. Going a step further, he married his own cousin sister, belonging to the noblest and blue-blooded tribe of Quraysh, to his freed serf Zayd, who had since been adopted as his son. It was then that the writ of God was revealed abolishing all artificial relationships, as the custom of adoption was, in order to restore the hereditary rights of blood-

relations. Zayd ibn Muhammad again become Zayd ibn Hârith.

For the time honoured customs die hard, social reforms seldom succeed unless pressed to their logical end. But, the task was difficult as well as dangerous, because, marriage with the widowed or divorced wife of the adopted son was looked down upon by the Arabs as ignominious and incestuous, The Commandment of God had, nevertheless, to prevail, if only to curb the evils emanating from that custom, although it meant sealing one's infamy. The holy Prophet had again to set an example by marrying the divorced wife of Zayd. He broke the age-old custom of the pagan past and put an end to the system of adoption and its evils for ever.

There are many more examples to be cited but the limited time available would not permit me to do so. Still, the instances just given are enough to set you thinking whether there is any other teacher and guide of humanity right from Adam to Jesus Christ who was able to present such illustrious models of practical morality in every field of life?

A few words more and I would finish the day's discourse. You would have seen several eloquent preachers talking about the spiritual coupling of the Heavenly Father and His only begotten Son. But, if a tree is known by its fruits, you have to see whether divine love was also discernible in the life of its gosseller! Read the biography of the adorer of God born in Arabia and you would find that when the whole world fell asleep, this lover of God used to bow down in worship, his hands raised in prayers, tongue singing the praises of God, his heart troubled and uneasy and his eyes shedding tears in holy breathing. Does this present the picture of love or the life of Jesus?

When Jesus was crucified he, "cried with a loud voice saying, '*Eli, Eli lama sabach thani?* — My God, my God, why have You

forsaken me.’”<sup>123</sup> But when the Prophet breathed his last he was reciting, “*Allâh ar-Rafeeq al-A‘ala* — My Lord, my dearest friend.”

Whose was the spirit of piety that flowed into his life and conduct and mode of expression?

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<sup>123</sup> Mt. 27:46.

## Seven

# THE MESSAGE OF MUHAMMAD

We have seen how, of all the prophets and founders of religions, Muhammad (bpuh) alone has left eternal and shining model of virtuous behaviour for the guidance of humanity. These are, in truth, exemplifications of goodness and godliness, upheld by reason and proved by history. Now, the question arises: What are the teachings of this universal Guide? Are they ever-abiding and do they constitute an improvement on the divine message received aforetime through the earlier messengers of God? For in the ages past apostles of God did bring guidance and light from on High; it was only that their messages perished since they were not meant to live on forever and ever. And, since, the chain ended with Muhammad, his teachings must remain alive to the end of time.

The Prophets of yore were messengers of truth, but only to the people among whom they were born, or for a particular age. Their teachings were short-termed, for God had not undertaken to hold them on for years on end. The original teachings of all the earlier prophets were, thus, either lost, or imperfectly compiled many years after their death, or interpolations were made in their scriptures, or they were even changed out of recognition by their scribes, translators and annotators. Sometimes, these scriptures were mutilated within a few years of the death of apostles bringing them and, what is more, there was never maintained any authentic and

reliable record of how these scriptures and teachings were handed down by their followers. Now, if everything is governed by the Will and Wisdom of God Almighty, this in itself constitutes a sufficient testimony to the ephemeral character of the earlier scriptures and teachings of their prophets. Then came the everlasting message of God through Muhammad, which has remained ever-new since the day it was brought by him. It shall ever remain fresh for no other message is to come from God again. Of a fact, God never told any other messenger that the message vouchsafed to him was complete and perfect or that He intended to preserve it from oblivion. The earlier scriptures were lost because their perennality was not guaranteed by God. They vanished like dreams, for God had willed them to be so. Actually, far from containing any reference to the permanence of perfection of these scriptures, one finds, in whatever portions of them that are extant today, passages indicating their transitory character and reason for their ultimate extinction.

Moses (peace be upon him) says in the Torah:

“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto him ye shall harken.<sup>124</sup>...” “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth: and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”<sup>125</sup>

The blessing Moses invoked for the children of Israel, before his death was:

“The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints; From his right hand went fiery law for them.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Deut. 18:15.

<sup>125</sup> Deut. 18:19

<sup>126</sup> Deut. 33:1-2.

Torah declares, unequivocally, in the passages cited above, that another prophet like Moses would be raised by God who would speak only what God would bid him to say. Does it not show that the message and the guidance and the law brought by Moses was not for ever?

Another Prophet of the Old Testament, Isaiah, foretells about the advent of the servant of God, who “shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles.”<sup>127</sup> “The new Prophet”, shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgement in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law.”<sup>128</sup> Malachi, yet another Prophet, makes the prediction, “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.”<sup>129</sup> Psalms and other books of the Old Testament contain similar prophecies about the prophet to come in due time. These divinations afford a conclusive proof against the abiding nature of the Jewish scriptures.

Let us now turn to the New Testament. It quotes Jesus as saying: “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”<sup>130</sup>

Jesus further says:

“But the Comforter, *which is the Holy Ghost*, whom the father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

Explaining why the last and abiding guide would be sent by the Father, he says:

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<sup>127</sup> Is. 42:1.

<sup>128</sup> Is. 42:4.

<sup>129</sup> Mal. 3:1.

<sup>130</sup> Jn. 14:16.

“I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak; and he will show you things to come.”<sup>131</sup>

These verses of the Gospel affirm that the Christian Scripture is also not the last word of God nor is it perfect. It announces the coming of another man of God in order to carry through the work left incomplete by Jesus Christ. But the revelation received by Muhammad neither speaks of any new messenger of God to give any new message nor it alludes to its, being incomplete. On the contrary, it declares:

﴿... This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you...﴾ (*Qur'an* 5: 3)

The Qur'an goes on, even further, to proclaim Muhammad as,

﴿... the seal of the Prophecy...﴾ (*Qur'an* 33: 40)

— while Muhammad (bpuh), on his part, asserts that, “There would be no apostle after me.”<sup>132</sup> Several other traditions of the Prophet (bpuh), elucidate the point further. “I am the last brick of the edifice of prophecy,” says a tradition handed down from the Prophet (bpuh). In fact, not a single verse of the Qur'an alludes to the advent of any new prophet after Muhammad (bpuh). Thus, if we were to go by the internal evidence contained in the scriptures of different religions, that is, their own claims in regard to being the last and final message sent by God for the guidance of the human race, only the revelation vouchsafed to Prophet Muhammad would stand the test of perfection and finality, and would be found destined to be preserved in its purity

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<sup>131</sup> Jn. 16:12-13.

<sup>132</sup> Muslim, *Bâb al-Masjid*.

to the end of time. God, the Most High has, accordingly, undertaken the responsibility to preserve it unchanged; for He, assures:

﴿... We verily are its Guardian.﴾ (Qur'an 15: 9)

Another question that ought to be given thought is: Has any other divine communication, besides that received through Muhammad (bpuh), a universal character? So far as the Jews are concerned, the world is all the same to them as children of Israel. Hebrew prophets never preached their faith among non-Israelites: Bani Israel (children of Israel) are the 'chosen race' and their God is the god of their own tribe. Jesus Christ, too emphatically denied that he had been sent to any people save 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'.<sup>133</sup> He even refused to preach the Gospel to the gentiles for he did not consider it "to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs."<sup>134</sup> *Vedas* were, likewise, not permitted to reach the ears of non-Aryans, as all other races were unclean in the eyes of ancient Aryans. Molten zinc was to be poured in the ears of unclean *shudras* if they happened to hear the sacred *Vedas*.

The message of Islam was, thus, the first and the only divine gospel of glad tidings preached by Muhammad to all. To the blacks and the whites, to the Arabs and the non-Arabs, to the Turks and the Tartars, to the Indians and the Chinese and to the Africans and the Europeans. Just as Islam called its God as the,

﴿... Lord of the worlds.﴾ (Qur'an 1: 2)

— it also declared its Prophet as the,

﴿... Mercy to the worlds.﴾ (Qur'an 21: 107)

Its message was for one and all, universal and world-wide, the

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<sup>133</sup> Mt. 15:24.

<sup>134</sup> Mt. 15:26.

Qur'an says:

﴿... Lo! It is not but a Reminder to [His] creatures.﴾ (*Qur'an* 6: 90)

﴿Blessed is He Who has revealed unto His slave the criterion [of right and wrong], that he may be a warner to the people onto Whom belongs the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth...﴾

(*Qur'an* 25: 1-2)

Muhammad (bpuh) was sent as a warner for all the peoples and his ministry extended to the entire world encompassed by the Kingdom of God.

﴿Say [O' Muhammad]: 'O' Mankind! I am the Messenger of Allah to you all — [the messenger of] Him unto Whom belongs the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth...﴾ (*Qur'an* 7: 158)

His message recognised no distinctions of race and country. He was bidden to declare that —

﴿... This Qur'an has been inspired in me, that I may warn you therewith and whomsoever it may reach...﴾ (*Qur'an* 6: 19)

And, Muhammad (bpuh) was told by God, the All-Glorious:

﴿And We have not sent you [O' Muhammad] save as a bringer of good tidings and a warner unto all mankind...﴾ (*Qur'an* 34: 28)

Islam is, thus, the only religion which claims to be the last, final and universal message of God for the entire humanity. A tradition related in the *Ṣaḥeeḥ* of Muslim quoted the Prophet (bpuh) as saying: "The prophets before me were sent to their people, while I have been raised for all the nations of the world." The claim made by the Prophet of Islam is fully corroborated by history. In truth and reality, the religion preached by the last Prophet is as much perfect, ever-abiding and universal as are his own life and character, perfect

models of goodness and virtue for all the people and for all times to come.

Now, the searchlight needs to be turned to find out what actually constitute this universal, perfect and perpetual principle of human guidance which supplemented and completed the previous religions and perfected the blessings of God on His creatures.

The precepts of every religion can be divided into two parts; one, that which fulfils the innermost urge of human heart, and the other, that which relates to his terrestrial existence. The first, satisfying the soul, is known as *Eemân* or faith, and the second, governing the body, as *'Amal* or action. The latter can further be subdivided into devotions to God or *'ibâdah* dealings between the people or *mu'ammalât*, and lastly, the morals or *akhlâq*. These four, the beliefs, devotions, transactions and the morals comprise the fundamental teachings of every religion, and in presenting a perfect concept of each of these Islam excels all religions.

The creeds of Judaism and Christianity as enunciated in the Old and New Testaments are rather vague. Old Testament does mention of the existence and Unity of God, but it is hardly satisfying to the head and heart. The attributes of God constitute the wherewithal for spiritual perfection and are a means to attain the gnosis and love of God, but neither the Old nor the New Testament contains anything about it. Next to the concept of God comes prophecy, but all the scriptures of revealed religion prior to that of Islam, woefully fail in describing the nature and purpose of prophecy and revelation, the worth and merit of divine apostles, their appearance in all the countries and nations for the guidance of human beings, and their impeccability, moral rectitude and the great task performed by them. We find some faint traces of such concepts as retribution in the after-life, hell and heaven, Day of Judgement and similar other matters in the Old Testament while the Gospels contain

only a few sketchy answers given by Jesus Christ (may peace be upon him) in reply to a question posed by a certain Jew about these matters. There are one or two sentences about the heaven and the hell in the New Testament. This is all that these two Scriptures have to offer about what is known as the creed of revealed religions. But one can find detailed answers to each of these questions in the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad (Blessings and peace be upon him).

The conception in regard to angels presented in the Old Testament is again quite hazy: It is rather difficult to distinguish between God and the angels as described in the Jewish Scriptures. Christian Gospels mention a few angels, but one of them, known as Holy Ghost, so resembles the Divine Being that one may call him both God and an angel or neither of the two. Islam, on the other hand, clearly defines their nature, status and functions and the relationship they bear to God, and His apostles and to other creatures of God, the Almighty. This is how Islam has given a most perfect creed among all the religions.

We can now turn to human actions in relation to God and their fellow beings. Worship occupies the first place, in every religion, amongst all the actions of human beings. The Old Testament speaks of oblation in some detail and prescribes the rituals and other essential conditions for the offering of sacrifices. It also makes a few references to fasting, supplications and even to the *Beit il* or the House of God, but all these are referred to only casually or accorded such an insignificant place in its narrations that one is very often apt to miss them altogether. It neither describes the method and the rules of offering prayers nor says anything about the timings of worship. The Book of Psalms does contain a number of litanies and adorations, but it is again silent about how to perform the divine service. Worship occupies a still more negligible place in the New Testament. At one place it speaks of the 'forty days fast of Jesus

Christ', when he is reported to have been, 'ahungered'.<sup>135</sup> The Gospels record even the objection raised by the Jews: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?"<sup>136</sup> The prayer offered by Jesus (may peace be upon him) is also mentioned, during the night before crucifixion when the Master is reported to have taught a prayer to his disciples. This is the only occasion when Jesus teaches something about paying homage to God, but what about other devotions and the way of offering them? None at all! In Islam, however, everything is Lucid and well defined; prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, the method and the conditions necessary for their observance; remembrance of God, devotional exercises, hours of prayer, the days and timings for keeping and the termination of fasts; the time, rules and rituals for performing the Ḥajj; supplications and invocations, contrition, thanks giving and glorifications. In short, everything about lifting up of the heart and perfection of spirit and attaining the love and fellowship of God is to be found here, described in a perfect and soul stirring manner.

Dealings concerned with the mutual relations of men and the laws of government, as stated earlier, comprise the rest of human actions. This, in fine, is the social behaviour compressing individual, social and administrative norms of society. The Law brought by Moses (may peace be upon him) is sufficiently detailed on this subject and Islam has preserved the Mosaic Law to a large extent, although it mitigates its severity. In doing so, Islam has transformed the law of Moses from a tribal court to the law of nations. It has not only supplemented but also perfected the Mosaic Law by making suitable alterations and additions. The Book of Psalms and the Gospels contain hardly anything by way social laws save sketchy rules relating to such matter as divorce.

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<sup>135</sup> Mt. 4:2.

<sup>136</sup> Mt. 9:14.

A universal religion, set forth as the abiding principle of human guidance, must need to have a body of laws capable of maintaining an orderly society and the management of its public affairs. For Christianity had nothing of the kind, it had to make free with the laws of the pagan Romans and the Greeks. Islam on the other hand, formulated its own laws and presented such principles of legislation which could be amplified for developing new legislations capable of meeting the ever-changing needs of human society. Islam has since held sway over the world, at least for a thousand years, and during this period hundreds of kingdoms have adopted its law as the law of the land. They were all not only able to sustain civilized societies and viable governments with the help of the Law of Islam, but none has yet been able to improve upon them.

Morals constitute the third part of human action. Torah contains a few moral *principles*. The famous Ten Commandments of Moses really include seven<sup>137</sup> of these moral principles of which only one, that is, 'thou shalt honour your father and mother' can be deemed to be a positive norm while the remaining six are negative in character. These are: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his house, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's<sup>138</sup>. Now, coveting one's neighbour's wife is being identical to committing adultery, and the malicious desire to get hold of another man's property being much the same as stealing, there are in fact only four commandments of negative character instead of six. The New Testament merely repeats these commandments with one addition

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<sup>137</sup> Exod. 20:12-20.

<sup>138</sup> Deut. 5:17 - 21.

which is to love one's neighbour<sup>139</sup>. Islam has, on the other hand, amplified these five moral norms into twelve fundamental principles of ethical behaviour, as mentioned in the chapter of *Isrâ'* which was revealed by God on the occasion of Muhammad's ascension. One of these twelve relates to the Unity (Oneness) of God and the remaining eleven pertain to the moral behaviour. Five of these are negative, five are of a positive character and the last is the combination of both. These are:

1. Honour your parents.
2. Render unto others what is due to them.
3. Deal kindly with the orphans.
4. Fill the measure when you measure and weigh with right balance.
5. Fulfil your promise.
6. Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty.
7. Slay not the soul which Allah has forbidden save in the right.
8. Come not near unto adultery.
9. Follow not that whereof you have no knowledge.
10. Walk not in the earth exultant.
11. Squander not your wealth in wantonness but take the middle path.

These fundamental principles of morality show how Islam has perfected the Mosaic Law and brought it to completion. These laws lay bare the voice of conscience, point out the fount whence virtue springs, and show us the failings of our desires. They bring to light the devil within our nature and tell us how to conquer it.

This is how Islam shapes human actions.

If we want to sum up Islamic teachings in a two-fold principle, it could be called as faith in God and righteous action. These two cover the entire teachings of the holy Qur'an and the Prophet of

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<sup>139</sup> Mt. 19:19.

Islam, and on them depends salvation of man in the Hereafter. The Qur'an addresses the believers, at scores of places, as those who believe and do right and presents success and salvation as the fruits of these two. It would not be possible to go here into the details of the Islamic concepts of faith and righteous action, and hence let us confine ourselves to those aspects of Muhammad's message which have set right the misconceptions about these two perpetrated by the earlier religions. These were the mistakes of a fundamental nature which had kept humanity bound to grossness and corruption for ages.

The first of these fundamental issues, as held up to the view of humanity by the Prophet Muhammad, was the place occupied by man in the universe, particularly, in comparison to other created beings. This really constitutes the base of the doctrine of Divine Unity. Man regarded himself, before the advent of Islam, as inferior to most of the beings and objects. A mortal fear of the rocks, high mountains, running streams, verdant trees, raining clouds, blazing fires, dense forests, viperous snakes, rising sun, luminous stars, starry dark nights, roaring lions, milch cows and the ugly old women; in short, everything that could do him harm or good scared him to death. He bowed his head in reverence before every conceivable thing or phantom but Muhammad (bpuh) told him, for the first time, that none of these was his Lord and Master. Man was, explained Muhammad, the paragon of creation for everything had been created by God for his service. It was the holy Prophet who told him that man being the vicegerent of God on earth was the ruler to whom every other created being bowed in obeisance. Man had not been created to serve the world, but the world was created for his service. Declared the Qur'an:

«And when your Lord said unto the angles: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth...»  
*(Qur'an 2: 30)*

«He it is Who has placed you as viceroy on the earth...»  
*(Qur'an 6: 165)*

The new message from God, appointing man as the deputy of God on earth, bestowed on him a unique and undreamt of honour:

«Have you not seen how Allah has made all that is in the earth subservient unto you...?» (Qur'an 22: 65)

«Verily We have honoured the children of Adam...» (Qur'an 17: 70)

«He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth...» (Qur'an 2: 29)

And, the cattle were his servitors, rather than claimants of obeisance from him:

«And the cattle has He created, whence you have warm clothing and uses, and whereof you eat.» (Qur'an 16: 5)

The rains and the vegetation, growing therefrom, is for the benefit of man:

«He it is Who sends down water from the sky, whence you have drink, and whence are trees to which you send your beasts to pasture. Therewith He causes crops to grow for you, and the olive and the date-palm and grapes and all kinds of fruit...» (Qur'an 16: 10-11)

Even the day and the night, the sun and the moon and the stars are all for the service of man:

«... He covers the night with the day, which is in haste to follow it, and has made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient by His command...» (Qur'an 7: 54)

The rivers flow, not to be revered by man, but to be pressed into his service:

«And He it is Who has constrained the sea to be of service that you eat fresh meat from thence, and bring forth from thence ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships ploughing it that you may

seek of His bounty, and the haply you may give thanks.﴾

*(Qur'an 16: 14)*

The Qur'an has many more verses, emphasising the importance of man in the scheme of creation. A Gnostic poet<sup>140</sup> of Persia has very well summed up the whole idea in a verse which says —

“The clouds and the wind and the sun and the moon and the sky keep busy,

That you lay your hands on the bread and eat not carelessly.”

This was the message, brought by Muhammad (bpuh), lifting the man up as the deputy of God, placing the crown of honour on his head and assigning him central place in God's creations. To bow his head before any of these creatures became below his dignity: it rather meant demeaning his honour and prestige.

Man had been used to prostrate himself before the kings and the saints. The Pharaohs and the Nimrods, the Popes and the pontiffs and the monks and the friars had always hood-winked the simple-minded amongst men by laying a claim to a superior honour as the shadows of God and partakers in His divinity. This was an affront to human dignity which was rooted out by Muhammad (bpuh). He proclaimed the divine writ that one should,

﴿... ‘worship none but Allah’ and ‘ascribe no partner unto Him’...﴾

*(Qur'an 3: 64)*

The writ of God, the Exalted, commanded the prophets to proclaim:

﴿... None of us shall take others for lords besides Allah...﴾

*(Qur'an 3: 64)*

The celestial beings, among the creations invisible to man, and the prophets, among the creations of their own species, were certainly

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<sup>140</sup> S'adi of Shirâz city, Iran.

venerable but none could now claim the obeisance due to God:

﴿And He commanded you not that you should take the angels and prophets for lords.﴾ (Qur'an 3: 80)

Muhammad (bpuh) lifted up man so high that he could not now throw himself on his knees before anybody save God; nor could he even ask anyone for a favour except the Lord and Master. He told man that God alone, had the power to give and take away whatever He liked:

﴿And He it is Who in the heaven is God, as in the earth God...﴾ (Qur'an 43: 84)

﴿... His verily is all creation and commandment...﴾ (Qur'an 7: 54)

﴿... The decision is for Allah only.﴾ (Qur'an 6: 57)

﴿... Who has no partner in His Sovereignty.﴾ (Qur'an 17: 111)

The message of Muhammad the Prophet (bpuh) had, besides raising the status of man, another far-reaching consequence. Exclusive allegiance to the One and only God meant that nothing was Caesar's; all was God's. For the sovereignty and the kingdom and the command in heavens and earth belong to God, there is no king or emperor to demand anything that ought to be rendered to God. A man believing in this sublime concept of God's sovereignty would never agree to bow his head before any created being — the day and the night, the heavens and the earth, the rulers and the ruled, the forests and the deserts and the hills and the rivers. He would not stand in awe of anything, nor an earthly power could strike terror in his heart. The consequences of this spiritual principle and its significance for the worth and dignity of mankind are in reality so trenchant, so unbounded that it would be difficult to explain them.

The next principle of the fundamental teachings of Muhammad is that man has been created guiltless, free of all stains of previous sins. He is born with an upright nature. It is his action that makes an angel or devil of him. Iniquity degenerates man's primordial nature and blackens his character. It was the greatest glad tidings man had ever received, for, he had always been told to hang his head in shame. In China, Burma and India, the eastern religions had preached, and the doctrine had been accepted by some philosophers of Greece also, that the fate of man is predetermined by the deeds of his previous life. The belief in rebirth had, in consequence of the previous sins, condemned man to become indolent as well as indifferent to righteousness. It was a heavy stone placed on him which could neither be removed by his goodness nor moral rectitude. Actually, the birth in the world was itself a sign of one's sinfulness. Christianity marked no improvement, however. Instead of presenting a saner principle of life and morality, it joined its faith to the belief in the original sin of the old Adam. It preached that every man born in the world was evil in nature because he inherited the sin of his first forefather. And, this burden of guilt needed a sinless divine redeemer who could atone for the sins of human beings by sacrificing his own life. These were the beliefs which had made man sad and melancholy when Muhammad came to proclaim that man was born blameless. It was a message of faith and hope for it told man that his actions alone were accountable in shaping his destiny ahead. He called upon all men to keep in the right path and shun the ways of evil.

﴿By the fig and the Olive, By Mount Sinai, and by this land made safe, surely We have created man of the best stature, then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, save those who believe and do good works, for theirs is a reward unfailing.﴾ *(Qur'an 95: 1-6)*

A message of hope, indeed, it was, for the humanity was threatened by the besetting sin of previous life and the original sin of

a distant forefather. It declared man to be born of best stature, innocent and guiltless. Now he had power to make or mar his future through his own efforts.

﴿By the soul and Him who perfected it, And inspired it [with conscience of] what is wrong for it and [what] is right for it. He is indeed successful who causes it to grow, And he is indeed a failure who stunts it.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 91: 7-10)

Far from being of an evil nature, man is always born with an upright nature:

﴿Lo! We create man from a drop of thickened fluid to test him; So We make him hearing, knowing. Lo! We have shown him the way, Whether he be grateful or disbelieving.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 76: 2-3)

The Qur'an also calls attention of man to his responsibility:

﴿O man! What has made you careless concerning your Lord, the Bountiful, Who Created you, then fashioned, then proportioned you? Into whatever form He will, He castes you.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 82: 6-8)

Muhammad (bpuh) explained that religion was the demand of human nature or rather the two were identical. Vice was nothing but a sickness, not inherent in man's nature, but an extraneous growth.

﴿So set your purpose for religion as a man by nature upright — the nature [framed] of Allah, in which He has created man. There is no altering [the laws of] Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 30: 30)

— The message contained in this verse of the Qur'an was admirably explained by the Prophet when he said that, "No infant is born who has not an uncorrupted soul, but it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian. Every beast gives birth to a wholesome cub. Do you see them being born with deformed ears?"

It is not difficult to imagine what a news of goodness and cheer would have been the message of Muhammad (bpuh). How it gave hope to the humanity condemned for the sins never committed by it as how it instilled the sense of responsibility and freedom into every man who was given power to work his way to everlasting salvation!

Before the advent of Islam, the world was divided into different tribes, clans and families, each one of them keeping aloof and being indifferent to one another. To the sages of ancient India the voice of God could be heard was the god of their own country whose blessings were limited to a few selected castes and clans of the rulers and priests of the Aryavetra. Zoroaster listened to the message from on High, but only for the people of blessed Iran. Bani Israel (children of Israel) believed in the voice of prophecy, but the prophet of peace, whom they awaited, could not come from any people except from the lineage of David. No country and no people were willing to share even God's grace and blessings with a people not their own. It was then that Muhammad came with a message for all the lands and countries. He told the world that divine guidance admitted of no distinction of race and language, colour or country: Palestine and Iran, India and Arabia were all equal in the sight of God. The world was told, for the first time, that God had sent His apostles to every country and nations for the guidance of man.

﴿And there is not a nation but a warner has passed among them.﴾  
*(Qur'an 35: 24)*

﴿... And for every folk a guide.﴾ *(Qur'an 13: 7)*

﴿Verily We sent before you [Muhammad] messengers to their own folk...﴾ *(Qur'an 30: 47)*

The Jew does not recognise a non-Israelite prophet. For the Christian it is not at all necessary to accept the apostleship of a

Hebrew prophet or one born among another people; he is not bound by his faith to acknowledge any messenger of God save Jesus Christ (may peace be upon him). To the Zoroastrian no country of the world except Iran was illuminated by light divine. But Muhammad (bpuh) proclaimed that the entire human race living in any country of the world, was the creation of One God, and all the peoples and races were equally blest by the Lord. Whether it was Iran or India, China or Greece, Arabia or Assyria, God had sent the light of His guidance to every nook and corner of the world. His apostles came to show the path of virtue and goodness to all the races and nations. He placed so much emphasis on the universal character of divine guidance that no Muslim could claim to be a believer unless he acknowledged all the messengers of God and all the scriptures or messages brought by them to the people of old. A Muslim has thus to affirm the apostleship of all the prophets of God whether enumerated in the Qur'an or not, for all of them came with the same message of truth to their own peoples.

According to the Qur'an, only they are Muslims —

﴿... Who believe in that which is revealed unto you [Muhammad] and that which was revealed before you...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 4)

Again, at another place, the Qur'an says:

﴿... But righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scriptures and the Prophets...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 177)

The same *Soorah* of the Qur'an amplifies the doctrine for the third time:

﴿... Each one believes in Allah and His angels and His Scriptures and His messengers — We make no distinction between any of His messengers...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 285)

No Muslim is permitted to discriminate against any apostle of God:

﴿O' you who believe! Believe in Allah and His messenger and the Scripture which he has revealed unto His messenger, and the Scripture which he revealed aforetime...﴾ (Qur'an 4: 136)

Is there any other religion showing the same large-heartedness, teaching equal reverence to all the prophets, all the men of God and founders of religions? Was such a universal message taught to humanity by anyone before Muhammad? Such was the tolerance, love and mercy of the last Prophet which encompassed every household and every son of Adam.

The religions of yore had set up intermediaries between man and God. Kahins and priests were mediators in the temples of ancient deities, Jews had entrusted the office to the sons of Lavi who led the liturgical prayers and performed oblations, while Christians had accepted the claim of certain disciples of Jesus and the popes that whatever they would bind would be bound in heaven and whatever they would divest would be removed by God. The popes and pontiffs exercised the power to remit the sins of their followers. Brahmins, among the Hindus, believed that they had been created out of the right hand of God. They had thus the right to form the link between man and his deity and to perform the sacred rites on their behalf. But Islam abolished priesthood and with it the evils of priestcraft, the abuse of priestly power and the priestly distortion of religion. It recognised no priests, no rabbis, no popes and no prerogatives to bind and unbind, for God alone had the power over His creatures. It allowed none to intrude between God and his bondmen. Any believer could lead the prayers, offer sacrifices, solemnize marriages and perform the religious ceremonies. It blazoned the message of God to every human being:

﴿... 'Pray unto me and I will bear your prayer'...﴾ (Qur'an 40: 60)

— and allowed every man to call and speak and send up his prayer to

the Lord with a respectful familiarity. This was yet another freedom granted to the human race from the tyranny of priesthood.

The primitive and pure faith of man has always been led astray by undue adoration of the holy men of God charged to show him the right path. Whenever man has wanted to show his admiration of these pious souls, he has raised them to the pedestal of God, or His like, or His incarnation. The Kahins of ancient Babylon, Egypt and Assyria had all the earmarks of the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Hindus. The Buddhas and the Mahaviras were accepted as gods by their followers almost in the same way as Christians had transformed Jesus into the Son of God. But, the ways of man are queer, indeed sometimes he showed such a lack of respect for his revered guides and teachers that, like Bani Israel (children of Israel), he gave the name of prophet to every soothsayer and diviner. Foretelling of events, irrespective of one's moral character and spiritual attainments, was enough for the Israelites to call anyone a prophet. This is why we find shameful stories of illicit love and deceit related about Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament.

Islam correctly defined the status of the Prophets. It explained that the prophets were neither God, nor His likeness, nor His son, nor yet His Kinsmen, for they were mortals like all other men. So very astounding was this concept that the pagans of Makkah could hardly believe their ears. They used to ask the Prophet in amazement: "What, a prophet and a man?" And, the Prophet's candid reply to these men was:

﴿... Say [Muhammad], 'My Lord be glorified! Am I naught save a mortal messenger?'...﴾ (Qur'an 17: 93)

Islam denied that the Prophets possessed supernatural powers or had any say in the affairs of God. Even the miracles worked by them were brought about with the permission of God. But, despite

the fact that they were human beings, they were not like ordinary mortals since they enjoyed the privilege of conversing with God, were recipients of divine revelations and were free of all sins. As perfect guides of humanity they were a witness to these realities of the celestial realm which are beyond the ken of human perception. They are the assured ones, having wisdom and faith and guidance from the Lord of the world. Every man is thus duty-bound to obey and pay his regards to these truthful souls who are raised to preach the message of God to their fellow beings.

This was the path of moderation — the path avoiding the excesses of undue veneration and denial of the respect due to the prophets and founders of religions — that Islam showed to the world as a necessary adjunct to its higher concept of the Unity and Oneness of God.

# Eight

## FAITH AND PRACTICE

The original message of all the older religions was overlordship of the One and only God, but the subsequent generations went astray from the right path owing, chiefly, to three causes. The first of these was personification and portrayal of God; the second, deification of divine attributes into separate deities; and the third, the failure of man, so often, to comprehend the multiformity of divine acts and manifestations. Muhammad unravelled all these mysteries and expounded the doctrine of the Unity of God so forcefully that man would never commit these errors again, let us first take the personification of God and His attributes.

God and His attributes as well as the bond of love between Him and His creatures were delineated by earlier religions through imagery and exemplification. These always led to the personification of the Deity in images figures. The similitudes employed to depict God invariably took the shape of concrete representations in images and idols. The mercy and love of God for His bondmen, at first illustrated through similitudes and symbols, were impersonated in the end. The Aryans regarded women as an emblem of the most tender feelings of affection and this led to the relationship between God and man to be expressed in terms of kinship between a mother and her child. God was conceived by them as a living mother of the human beings. To certain other people in the ancient India, the

affectionate love of mother for the child was not sufficiently expressive of the stronger emotions of love felt by them for God, and thus their concept of relationship between God and human beings took the shape of husband and wife. Even today one can find friars dressed in women's attires as a mark of their devotion to God. The Romans as well as the Greeks conceived the Supreme Deity in the shape of a female. The Semites, who considered it indecent to talk openly about their womenfolk, visualized god as a father. Archaeological remains unearthed from the ruins of the ancient cities of Babylon, Assyria and Syria show that these peoples had personified God as a man. Similarly, the ancient Hebrews had formed the mental picture of God as the father of human beings and angels. The Scriptures of the Jews even contemplate the relationship between God and Bani Israel as analogous to a husband and his wife. Accordingly, we find Jewish sacred writings describing Bani Israel (children of Israel) as Jerusalem and the wives of God. Christians gave a literal interpretation to the description of God as a father. The Arabs also had, before the advent of Islam, concepts of similar nature. They imagined God as the father of angels who were supposed to be females. Islam, however, discarded all these similitudes and resemblances and forbade even the use of similies attributes into a multiplicity of independent deities, Islam curtly pronounced its judgment:

«... Nothing is as His likeness...» (*Qur'an* 42: 11)

This shook polytheism to its very foundations. In a short but pithy *Soorah*, the *Qur'an* has cleared all the misconceptions about the Supreme Being:

«Say, He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begotteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.» (*Qur'an* 112: 1-4)

In this small but pithy chapter of the Qur'an, called *The Unity*, or *The Purification of Faith*; the very essence of the Oneness of God has been enunciated in the clearest terms possible. It is like a beacon light pointing out the mistake of polytheistic concepts of God.

The message brought by Muhammad did not rend asunder the bond of love between man and his Master. It strengthened the feeling of attachment to God but, at the same time, tried to cast off all anthropomorphic representations picked up due to fervour of love to God with which man has ever been smitten. Islam regards the human passions of heart as passing affections. The love between wife and husband or father and son is, after all, transitory and thus ill-suited to express the sublime and ever-abiding adoration of God by His devoted bondman. Another reason for discarding similitudes is that they very often lead to paganish patterns of thought. Islam therefore, strictly avoids parallelisation as, for example, while commending recollection of God, the Qur'an says,

﴿... Remember Allah as you remember your fathers or with a more lively remembrance...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 200)

This verse, it would be seen, does not compare God to one's father, but approximates the love for one's father to that for God. Thus, the Qur'an avoids the human aspect of relationship between the father and the son but retains the emotion of attachment between the two. It goes on further to add ﴿or with a more lively remembrance﴾ in order to emphasise that even the love for one's father, mentioned earlier by it, is of a lower order, inferior and plebeian, in comparison to the sublimated ardour for propinquity to God. Take another example. Asking the believers to evolve themselves spiritually, the Qur'an says,

﴿... Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 165)

It never employs the analogy of father and son by calling God the "Father of the worlds"; on the contrary, it identifies Him as the 'Lord' or, 'Sustainer of the worlds'. It views God as being higher and more sublime than what can be expressed by the ephemeral relationship of the father and the son. The excellent names of God are many, including *ar-Rabb*, the Sustainer, who nourishes everything from its cradle to grave; *al-Wadood*, the Loving; *ar-Ra'oof*, the Kind, *al-Hannân*, the Affectionate, yet, He is neither father nor mother nor bears any resemblance to the created beings.

The second major cause of misunderstanding in regard to God has been the mistake so committed by the earlier religions in comprehending the divine attributes. People have made a god of every divine attribute in the past. Hinduism impersonated every divine and its conceivable similitude until the immense crowd of its deities reached the figure of three hundred and thirty millions<sup>141</sup>. Even a cursory glance at this pantheon will be enough to convince any body that the several hands of a god signify his great power while the multiplicity of heads express his super-human wisdom.

If one were to reflect over the different sects of the Hindus, one would find that God has been the chief cause of differences between them. The three great qualities of God viz., creativeness, sustentation and destruction were portrayed as separate deities in the form of *Brahma*, the Creator, *Vishnu*, the Sustainer and *Shiva*, the Destroyer, but gradually the worshippers joined their faith exclusively to one of them. Similarly the *Lingayats* took the phallic emblem as a token of the creativeness of the Supreme Deity.

The Christians, too, have made three out of One God by accepting the three attributes of God, viz, Life, Knowledge and Will as separate entities. Life was recognized as their, Knowledge as the

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<sup>141</sup> *Popular Hinduism*, Pp. 6-7.

Holy Ghost and Will as the only begotten Son of the Father. We find similar concepts of Trinity prevalent among the Roman and Greek philosophers and the Egyptian neo-Platonists. The Prophet Muhammad, however, pricked the bubble of these false beliefs for he showed that only the stupid and ignorant are deceived by the multiformity of divine attributes. The Qur'an says:

«Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.» (Qur'an 1: 2)

«... to Him belong the best names.» (Qur'an 17: 110, 20: 8, 59: 24)

And:

«Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth...» (Qur'an 24: 35)

The Christians of Arabia emphasized only the compassion of God by calling Him *Rahmân* or the Most Compassionate while the Pagans knew Him by the name of *Allah*. The Qur'an corrected both when it said:

«Say: Cry unto the *Rahmân*, unto whichever you cry [it is the same]. His are the most beautiful names.» (Qur'an 17: 110)

It told them further:

«... But, Allah, He [alone] is the Protecting Friend. He quickened the dead, and He is Able to do all things.» (Qur'an 42: 9)

«... Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.» (Qur'an 2: 173, 226)

«And He it is who in the heaven is God, and in the earth God. He is the Wise, the Knower.» (Qur'an 43: 84)

Whether one believes it or not, there is no God save Him. He gives life and takes it away, He is the Lord of all those who are alive as also of their forefathers: He is the *Brahma*, the *Shiva* and the *Vishnu*, all in One, Whose attributes are countless.

«Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Heavens, Lord of the Earth, the Lord of the Worlds. And unto Him [alone] belongs majesty in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.» (*Qur'an* 45: 36-37)

«He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Knower of the invisible and the visible. He is Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, peace, the Keeper of faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner [unto Him]. He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of nothing, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.»

(*Qur'an* 59: 22-24)

Such is the Islamic concept of the Oneness or, rather, uniqueness of God: He is essentially a Unitary Being, indivisible and inseparable from His attributes. The religions of old had separated the attributes from the Divine Being, and, in doing so, they had created numerous gods. The Qur'anic verse,

«... Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partners unto Him,» (*Qur'an* 52: 43)

— refers to this very mistake inherent in the polytheistic concept of God. Thus the last message of All Merciful God brought forth by Muhammad told the wayward humanity that the Supreme Being is Allah, who alone is the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner, the King, the Holy, the Faithful, the mighty, the Repairer, the Merciful and the Compassionate. He is One, His attributes are countless.

Multifariousness of divine functions is yet another cause of polytheism. The primitive mind believed that there are different celestial forces operating simultaneously — one kills, the other gives life, the third sows the seeds of discord and yet another patches up the

differences. They thought that the god of love was different from the god of enmity; if one gave knowledge, the other bestowed riches. The minds untrained in analytical thinking imagined of a thousand deities performing the tasks assigned to them but Islam told them that God is the author of whatsoever happens in the universe.

The interpretation of diverse and dissimilar acts of God into two broad categories of good and bad presented another difficulty to the ancient; they believed that both could not emanate from the same source. Zoroaster offered a solution by developing the principle of dualism. He made one god for everything good and righteous and another one for the bad and the evil. To these twin spirits, he gave the names of *Ahura Mazda* or *Omuzd* and *Angra Manyu* or *Ahriman*, whose age-long struggle went on perpetually in the world. Zoroaster was misled because he failed to understand the true nature of the good and the evil. The fact is that there is nothing good or bad by itself, nor is there any virtue of evil in anything; every act assumes the colour or goodness or wickedness by the intention or purpose behind it. The fire, for instance, if you cook your food, or heat an engine, or allow the poor to get warmth from it, then it would be good and virtuous, but it would be vicious if you burn the hut of a destitute. Fire is thus neither good nor bad, but the use to which we put it makes it virtuous. The sword is, likewise, neither good nor bad by itself. So is darkness, for it will be iniquitous to steal by taking advantage of the night, but it would be a means to attaining saintliness if you worship the Lord and do good to the poor in the darkness of night away from the sight of others.

God has created this universe, the heavens and the earth and the matter and the properties embedded in different substances. He created man and also gave him head and heart, intellect and wisdom. Every man can see order and symmetry in the universe and its superb creation and working as well as in different substances and their

qualities. All this is enough to take one's breath away who cries out in amazement.

«... Glory to be Allah, the best of creators.» *(Qur'an 23: 14)*

He bows his head in reverence like Abraham who had paid homage to God with words,

«Lo! I have turned my face toward Him who created the heavens and the earth, as one by upright and I am not of the idolaters.»

*(Qur'an 6: 79)*

But, there is another man who takes matter to be self-existent and essence of every creation, the cause of all causes, and does not hesitate in speaking out;

«... There is nothing but our life of the world; we die and we live, and nothing destroys us save time.» *(Qur'an 45: 24)*

The cosmic order is the same, as are its marvels and the working, but it leads one to acknowledge the Supreme Creator while the other is misled by it to deny God altogether. The manifestation of Nature is one and the same for both, but in one case it shows the path of guidance; in the case of other it leaves him in sullen darkness. The truth is that the universe neither offers guidance nor it misleads any body, for, it is the light of one's own intellect which edifies or misguides him. Conversely speaking, one can claim that the universe is both a guide and a deceiver. Same is the case with the scriptures brought by the prophets of God. We see some receiving guidance and light, consolation and faith by reading the Qur'an or the Gospels, while others begin to entertain doubts and end up as disbelievers. Verily, the message is one, but the hearts are two. Both these hearts have been created by the One and the same God, not two, although the result is quite dissimilar. This goes to show that the duality of consequences or actions does not necessarily mean that the mover

should also be more than one. All the multifariousness of natural phenomena, thus, emanated from the same source; good and evil are bound by the same law, and the master of everything is but one Lord, God of the whole universe.

﴿... He misleads many thereby, and He guides many thereby, and He misleads thereby only miscreants.﴾ (Qur'an 2: 26)

﴿Those who break the covenant of Allah after ratifying it, and sever that which Allah ordered to be joined, and [who] make mischief in the earth: Those are they who are the losers.﴾ (Qur'an 2: 27)

﴿... Allah guideth not disbelieving folk.﴾ (Qur'an 2: 264)

These verses of the Qur'an explicitly state that the prime mover of everything, good and evil, is the Ultimate Being, but in each case it is the upshot of one's own goodness or wickedness. Man disbelieves first, becomes perverted and wicked thereafter, and then goes astray. He never deviated from the right path unless he becomes depraved and corrupt.

God created man showed him the right path as well as the ways which lead to viciousness and destruction. Says God in the Qur'an:

﴿Lo! We have shown him the way, whether he be grateful or disbelieving.﴾ (Qur'an 76: 3)

God is, beyond doubt, the Creator of all that is nice and good as well as that which is evil and bad, for He, Himself says:

﴿Such is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of all things. There is no God save Him...﴾ (Qur'an 40: 62)

﴿... Allah has created you and what you make.﴾ (Qur'an 37: 96)

But, let it also be remembered that,

﴿... Our Lord is He Who gave unto everything its nature, then guided it aright.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 20: 50)

It is thus man who chooses the path of virtue or wickedness of his own free will: he causes himself to be misled or guided aright of his own accord. If he takes to the wrong path, he would obviously become depraved but if he selects the right one, he would surely be guided on the path of virtue. There is, thus, no vice or virtue except the consequences of one's own free will. It follows, therefore, that the good and the evil are not independent forces which need be defined or should require separate deities. God is one and He is the author of both.

﴿... Is there any creator other than Allah who provides for you from the sky and the earth? There is no God save Him! Whither then are you turned?﴾  
(*Qur'an* 35: 3)

God has sent the guidance through his prophets. Man is at liberty to accept it or reject it.

﴿Then we gave the Book as inheritance unto those whom We elected of Our bondmen. But of them are some who wrong themselves and of them are some who are lukewarm, and of them are some who outstrip [others] through good deeds, by Allah's leave...﴾ (*Qur'an* 35: 32)

﴿... Whatever of misfortune strikes you, it is what your right hands have earned. And He forgives much.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 42: 30)

﴿And [He] inspired it [with conscience of] what is wrong for it and [what is] right for it. He is indeed successful who causes it to grow, and he is indeed a failure who stunts it.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 91: 8-10)

Worship was, and still is, a fundamental discipline of every religion. The older religions had, however, mistaken self-torture for

veneration of God. They had somehow convinced themselves that the more one suffers agony and subjects one's body to suffering and pain, the more one advances spiritually towards piety and purity of soul. Yoga and monasticism of the ancient India were the results of these misconceived notions, for it was then thought that self-mortification opened the doors to spiritual elevation. Among the Christians, too, atrocious and sordid routines of self-torture had spread in the medieval Europe had taken to strange practices; some of them refrained from taking baths throughout their lives, some clad themselves in tatters or tunics made of coarse flax or hemp, some remained unclad even during freezing cold season, some had taken a vow to remain standing for the rest of their lives, some lived in the deserted dens of wild beasts, some always remained in the sun, some dwelt on bare rocks, some ate only leaves of the trees, some scrupulously avoided contact with women and some even hanged themselves upside down from the trees. These ways of worshipping God were deemed highly meritorious all over the West during the dark ages. Other countries of the world were no better, either. It was in this atmosphere, prevailing throughout the world, that Islam came to set right these strange concepts in regard to payment of homage to God. It delivered humanity from these fiendish practices by telling that self-torture and bodily exertions were neither demanded by God nor they led to the union of the devotee's spirit with the Supreme Being. God appreciates, man was told by Islam, not physical exercises but the purity of heart and intentions. In fact, God never wants man to bear unnecessary hardships. The writ of the Lord is clear enough:

﴿Allah tasks not a soul beyond its scope...﴾      (*Qur'an* 2: 286)

The discipline of religious devotion taught by Muhammad (bpuh) discarded monasticism:

﴿... But monasticism they invented — We ordained it not for them...﴾  
*(Qur'an 57: 27)*

The Prophet (Blessings and peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "There is no monasticism in Islam."<sup>142</sup>

To those who take a vow to refrain from anything made permissible by God, the Qur'an puts the question:

﴿Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His bondmen...﴾  
*(Qur'an 7: 32)*

Nobody, not even a pious man is allowed to forsake the world. Once, when the Prophet of Islam (bpuh) had decided not to take honey any more, he was warned by God, the Most Wise:

﴿O' Prophet! Why ban you that which Allah has made lawful for you?...﴾  
*(Qur'an 66: 1)*

Islam told the world that worship, essentially, consisted of the acknowledgement of complete and unquestioned loyalty to the Lord and Master of the world and was a means to strengthen that bond:

﴿O' mankind! Worship your Lord, Who has created you and those before you, so that you may ward off [evil].﴾  
*(Qur'an 2: 21)*

The message of Muhammad (bpuh) was, thus, the first direction reaching humanity about the true nature and purpose of worship that man needed to offer up to God. He told the world that lifting up of one's heart to God in complete surrender to Him was all that God demanded of men:

﴿... Lo! Those who scorn My service, they will enter hell, disgraced.﴾  
*(Qur'an 40: 60)*

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<sup>142</sup> Abu Dawood.

The benefit to be derived from such a form of worship, was nothing except this:

﴿... Lo! Worship preserves from lewdness and iniquity...﴾

(*Qur'an* 29: 45)

The purpose of worship was thus explained by the Prophet (bpuh):

﴿... Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may ward off [evil].﴾

(*Qur'an* 2: 183)

The pilgrimage prescribed by Islam is also intended to promote remembrance of God:

﴿That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the name of Allah on appointed days over the beast of cattle that He has bestowed upon them...﴾

(*Qur'an* 22: 28)

Payment of poor-due is another form of divine service enjoined by Islam. It is meant to cleanse the heart of the believers besides affording assistance to the weaker sections among them:

﴿... Who giveth his wealth that he may grow [in goodness], and none has with him any favour for reward, except as seeking [to fulfil] the purpose of his Lord Most High.﴾

(*Qur'an* 92: 18-20)

The Prophet of Islam (bpuh) expressly forbade celibacy and commanded his followers to enter into wedlock: "Matrimony is my practice. Whoever abandons my custom does not belong to me." Likewise, the Qur'an describes marriage and progeny as "comforts" to be longed for by man:

﴿And who say, 'Our Lord! Vouchsafe us comfort of our wives and of our offspring...'﴾

(*Qur'an* 25: 74)

Oblation is another form of worship recognized by almost every religion. In the bygone ages people sometimes sacrificed

themselves or immolated their children to propitiate their deities. The blood of the sacrificed man's heart was sprinkled over the idols or was burnt before them. The Prophet of Islam (Blessings and peace be upon him) was again the first founder of a religion who explained the real purpose of offering sacrifices and forbade the killing of human beings as well as burnt offerings by way of oblation. The message brought by him opened the eyes of man to the underlying purpose of sacrifice. It declared:

«And the camels! We have appointed them among the ceremonies of Allah. Therein you have much good. So mention the name of Allah over them when they are drawn up in lines. Then when their flanks fall [dead], eat thereof and feed the beggar and the supplicant. Thus have We made them subject unto you, that haply you may give thanks. Their flesh and their blood reach not Allah, but the devotion from you reaches Him. Thus have We made them subject unto you that you may magnify Allah that He has guided you. And give good tidings [O' Muhammad] to the good...» *(Qur'an 22: 36-37)*

The perverted beliefs in regard to sacrifice entertained by the people, in the pre-Islamic era, had given rise to many more evils. Man considered himself master of his own life and the lives of his wife and children. Now, the sacrifice of human life being already considered meritorious, suicide, and *Sati* or immolation of widows in funeral pyre of deceased husbands had come into vogue all over the world. A number of these customs enjoyed even the sanction of different religions. Islam put an end to the malpractices by enunciating the principle that the life of man belonged to God Who permitted it to be taken only lawfully. Islam allowed sacrifice of animals only; no man in any circumstances was permitted to offer his own or another man's life to propitiate God. It debarred the people committing suicide from entering the heaven forever with the result that the incidence of suicide among the Muslims is to this day, much

lower than that in the civilized nations of Europe and America. The laws enacted by the Western nations to check suicide have, in fact, proved ineffective since people still consider it to be the easiest method of getting rid of their worries and miseries. The people committing suicide either lack faith in God or consider God would not question them why they had put an end to their lives. Islam, on the other hand, has been far more effective in checking suicides because it makes human life a divine trust. It tells the people that by taking their lives they would only be exposing themselves to a heavier penalty in the Hereafter instead of ending their worldly worries. Says the Qur'an:

﴿... And that you slay not the life which Allah has made sacred, save in the course of justice. Thus He has commanded you in order that you may discern.﴾  
(*Qur'an* 6: 151)

﴿... Kill [or/destroy] not yourselves. Lo! Allah is ever Merciful unto you. If any do that in rancour and injustice, We shall cast him into Fire...﴾  
(*Qur'an* 4: 29-30)

Infanticide, particularly that of daughters, was prevalent among the Arabs, the Rajputs of India and several other peoples. Being more hardhearted than others, the Arabs even buried their daughters alive. The Qur'an threatened these people with dire punishment:

﴿And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked, 'For what sin was she slain?'﴾  
(*Qur'an* 81: 8-9)<sup>143</sup>

Infanticide has, by no means, been a social evil limited only to the past. There may still be persons who would not like to have any children at all for fear of losing their prosperity. So was the case with

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<sup>143</sup> *Mohammad and Mohammedanism*, Pp. 17-18.

the Arabs of the pagan past who approved of slaying the unwanted babies. The Greeks also did not lag behind others as they had devised the system of examining every newborn baby with a view to destroying the weaker ones by throwing them away from the hilltops.

Islam disapproved of all these practices, since, in its view, nobody except God, the Almighty provided the means of sustenance. It proclaimed:

«And there is not a beast on the earth but the sustenance thereof depends on Allah.» (*Qur'an* 11: 6)

«Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Lo! The slaying of them is great sin.» (*Qur'an* 17: 31)

Mankind was divided everywhere on the basis of colour and creed, caste and race. Ancient India regarded all other races and nations as unclean; it had even divided its own people into four classes, allowed all the rights and privileges to the first three and condemned the fourth to the level of a sub-human species. *Shudras*, as this fourth and the lowest class was known, were denied even the right to worship God like others. The Parthians, too, had effected a fourfold division of the society depending on vocations of the people. The Romans arrogated themselves as the masters of all other nations while the Jews assuming themselves to be 'the children of God' looked down upon others as goyim or gentiles. But, even this chosen race of God was not free from internal social prejudices. The Europe of today still considers the white races as superior to the coloured ones. There are still countries where blacks cannot claim equality with the whites, nor can they even travel in the same coach or have their houses in the districts reserved for the whites. Many Americans would still not give Negroes the right to live as free citizens in their country while South Africa denies, even now, equality to all the

coloured races whether they be Africans, Indians or Asiatics.<sup>144</sup> These distinctions are not confined to social or economic spheres alone, they extend even to the temples of God — the blacks must have churches apart from those meant for the whites. The two cannot even bow their heads together before God! Yet, the message brought by Muhammad abolished every distinction and prejudice of colour and race fourteen hundred years ago. On the very day Makkah was conquered the Quraysh, who exulted in their blue blood, were told by the Prophet in the House considered Holy of Holies by them:

“O’ Quraysh, God has taken from you the haughtiness of paganism and its veneration of ancestors. Man springs from Adam, and Adam sprang from dust.”<sup>145</sup>

Then, on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet again taught the lesson of human equality and brotherhood to a hundred thousand persons assembled round him:

“The Arabs have no preference over the non-Arabs, nor have the non-Arabs over the Arabs; all of you are sons of Adam, and Adam was created of clay.”<sup>146</sup>

The Prophet (bpuh) also explained the reason for denouncing racial prejudices:

“Allah has abolished the pride and haughtiness of paganism. Man is either pious or a sinner. All men sprang from Adam and Adam sprang from clay.”<sup>147</sup>

The Qur’an also repeats the same message:

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<sup>144</sup> This lecture was delivered in 1925.

<sup>145</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 53.

<sup>146</sup> *Musnad Ahmad*.

<sup>147</sup> Tirmidhi and Abu Dawood.

﴿O' mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct...﴾

(*Qur'an* 49: 13)

And also:

﴿And it is not your wealth nor your children that will bring you near unto Us, but he who believes and does good [he draws near]. As for such, theirs will be twofold reward for what they did, and they will dwell secure in lofty halls.﴾

(*Qur'an* 34: 37)

The Prophet (bpuh) had bidden his followers, on the day of the Farewell Pilgrimage: "Know that every Muslim is a brother unto another Muslim, and that all the Muslims are brethren unto one another."<sup>148</sup> This brotherhood still transcends all the man-made barriers of countries and nations. The blacks and the whites, the Iranians and the Arabs, the Turks and the Mongols, the Negroids and the Europeans submerge their differences in the brotherhood of faith. This is a great blessing from the Lord Most High. All become equals in the kingdom of God; none is untouchable or a noble; there are no *Shudras*, no *Brahmins*; the distinctions of wealth and vocations fall down to the ground. All can read the Qur'an, anybody can lead the prayers; all are equals in the matter of acquiring and diffusing knowledge. All are equals in the eyes of the Law also — a life for a life — becomes the governing principle whether one be a sovereign or serf.

There are many more aspects of Islamic canons of equity and equality; the rights it has conferred on women and slaves, to name only two, can convince any fair-minded person that the present-day Europe with all its claims to light and learning and liberalism, still

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<sup>148</sup> Ibn Ishâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 651.

lags behind Islam. The world can still learn a lot from Islam but the limited time at my disposal would not permit me to shed further light on this question.

The dichotomy of human affairs into spiritual and temporal has been the greatest mischief played with the world by what we know as modernism. This is the division fostered allegedly by a saying attributed to Jesus Christ render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are unto God's.<sup>149</sup> This has been the greatest trap into which the world has been drawn in but Islam smashes this snare. It tells the world that every worldly affair undertaken with sincerity and in accordance with the code of morals is meritorious in the sight of God. Everything temporal is, to put it the other way, virtuous if it is backed by morality and faith. It is wrong to think that religion demands withdrawal from the world for remembrance of God or that of one's livelihood, or looking after ones children, relations or countrymen falls in the sphere of mundane affairs. Islam does not accept his view of life; it tells that performance of one's duty with sincerity and fear of God is the highest religion.

Faith in God and good deeds are, thus, the two means of salvation according to Islam. Faith consists of belief in God, His prophets, His angels, His scriptures and retribution in the Hereafter. For sincerity and truthfulness depend on faith, no good deed is possible unless it is formed by a heartfelt realization of God and acceptance of His commands. Action, in its turn, is divided into three parts. The first is the glorification of God. Next come the dealings with fellow beings which cover all the individual and social transactions and on these depend the continuance of an orderly society as well as social and economic justice. Morals comprise the third category of human actions which cover all those obligations

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<sup>149</sup> Mt. 22:21.

which, although not legally binding, must be discharged faithfully in order to develop spiritually and to raise the level of society. These four: faith, worship, dealings and moral constitute the pathway to salvation and success according to Islam.

It also needs to be made clear that the quiescence or inaction has no place in Islam, which enjoins action and enterprise. Islam is not death, but life, for it declares:

«And that man has only that for which he makes effort.»

*(Qur'an 53: 39)*

And, also:

«Every soul is a pledge for its own deeds.»

*(Qur'an 74: 38)*

Islam teaches exertion and struggle, not merely in the recesses of one's heart, but also in the field of action. The life of the holy Prophet as well as the lives of his caliphs and companions are too well-known to all of us. They have shown the way of attaining salvation and success and advancement in this world and the world beyond. Mohammad's message differs from the Buddha inasmuch as the former teaches not the annihilation of desires but the disciplining of desires. It is also different from the teachings of Christ. Muhammad does not scorn wealth and power, he teaches how to make a proper use of the both.

Thus, faith and virtuous action constitute the matrix of faith in Islam. It commends action. Not inaction; exertion, not indolence; acceptance of responsibility and doing one's duty instead of shrinking selfishly from these. The examples set by the Prophet of Islam and his successors show the way of correct behaviour.

«It is not righteousness that you [merely] turn your faces to the East and the West: but righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last

Day and the Angels and the Scriptures and the Prophets; and gives wealth, for love of them, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and for setting slaves free; and establish prayer and pays the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress...﴾

(*Qur'an* 2: 177)

﴿Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. You [O' Muhammad] see them bowing down and falling prostrate [in worship], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] acceptance...﴾

(*Qur'an* 48: 29)

We find these noblest specimens of humanity, the Companions of Muhammad, waging wars at times; at others engaged in social service and doing good to their friends and companions; bowing down before God; praising Him very often and seeking their sustenance by hard labour on other occasions; yet, never unmindful of their Lord or His commandments. The Qur'an portrays their lives in these words:

﴿Men whom neither merchandise nor sale beguiles from the remembrance of Allah...﴾

(*Qur'an* 24: 37)

They carry on their trades and professions as well as seek the pleasure of God. They do not give up one for the other, but apply themselves to both in the same breath. Here is an instance preserved by history which illustrates how they spent their lives. At a time when hostilities are going on between the Muslims and the Byzantines, a few enemy spies enter the Muslim camp to find out the morale of Muslim soldiers. They go back and report to their Commander that the Muslim battlers are "anchorites by the night and veterans by the day." This is the ideal way of life taught by Islam and the world needs to learn it afresh.

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# GLOSSARY

**Hadiths** — Pl. of Hadith; Prophetic saying or a short account of some acts or words of the Prophet Muhammad. Also see *Sunnah*.

*Ahriman* — (Zoroastrian Concept) The Divine Being representing the creator of evil and noxious creatures.

*Ahura Mazda* — The Divine Being that created all that is good and virtuous.

*Akhlâq* — Lit. Morals; Covers nature, disposition, habits and manners of man.

**Allah** — The name of the Creator of the Universe in the Qur'an is Allah which is derived from *ilah*, a deity or god with the addition of definite article *al*. It is the essential name of God which has neither feminine, nor plural, nor has ever been applied to anything other than the unimaginable Supreme Being. There are also ninety-nine, 'excellent names' of God, like *ar-Rabb*, *al-Wadood*, *ar-Ra'oof*, *al-Hannân* which signify His different attributes.

*'Amal* — Lit. Action; Pl. *A'mâl*; work, deed

*Amânah* — Lit. Trust; (Arabic *Amânah*)

*Ameen* — Faithful or Trustworthy. *Al-Ameen* was the title given to the Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) when a youth, on account of his fair and honourable bearing, which won him the confidence of the people.

*Angra Mainu* — See *Ahriman*.

*Anṣâr* — The helpers, the name given to the converts of Madeenah as opposed to Makkan followers who migrated to Madeenah and were called *Muhâjireen* or migrants.

*‘Aqeeqa* — A custom observed on the birth of a child; shaving the hair of the infant’s head on the seventh or another appointed day, along with the sacrificing of a sheep or a goat to celebrate the occasion.

*Asmâ’ ar-Rijâl* — Lit. The names of men; A dictionary of biography of those who transmitted the traditions of the Prophet.

*‘Aṣr* — The obligatory prayer offered midway between afternoon and sun-set prayers, also time, name of a chapter of the Qur’an.

*Brahma* — (A Hindu Concept) The formless spirit of universe from which all beings issue and into which all merge.

*Brahmin* — The priestly class among the Hindus supposed to have been born from the mouth of *Brahma*. The other castes are *Kshatriyas*, or the soldier caste, born from the arms of *Brahma*; *Vaisyas*, or the agricultural caste, from the loins of *Brahma*; and *Shudras*, menials, from the foot of *Brahma*.

*Brahmo Samaj* — Lit. Church of God. A Hindu sect formed in 1830 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy on theistic i.e. Unitarian principle, and the rational ideas and sense of the brotherhood of man.

*Châsht* (Ar. *ad-Duhâ*) — A voluntary prayer offered before noon.

*Dharam Shastra* — Hindu religious scriptures and canonical writings.

*Dinâr* — A gold coin of ninety-six grams.

*Fajr* — The obligatory pre-dawn prayer.

*Hajj* — The pilgrimage to Makkah performed in the month of Dhul-Hijjah or the twelfth month of Islamic calendar from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of the month.

*Al-Ḥajr al-Aswad* — The black stone studded in the *Ka'bah* at the north-east corner near the door. It is kissed by the faithful after circumambulation of the *Ka'bah*.

*Al-Ḥannân* — An Attributive name of Allah, the Most Affectionate.

*Hijrah* — Lit. Emigration; applied to the migration of the Prophet of Islam (bpuh) and his first followers from Makkah to Madeenah; the beginning of the year in which this emigration took place (July 16, 622) is the starting point of the Muslim era.

*'Ibâdah* — A general term for religious observance comprising prayer, fasting, Ḥajj, zakah, i.e., payment of poor-due etc.

*'Eid al-Fiṭr* — The festival of fast-breaking at the end of the month of Ramaḍân, the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Shawwal, the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Islamic calendar.

*Eemân* — Lit. Faith; It is belief of the heart and the confession of the truth to which one joins his faith.

*'Ishâ'* — The obligatory prayer offered when the night has closed in.

*Ishrâq* — The voluntary prayer offered when the sun has well risen.

*Kitâb* or *al-Kitâb* — Lit. The Book; A term used for the Qur'an and extended to all the revealed scriptures.

*Lingayats* — A sect among the Hindus which worshipped the image of the penis as symbolizing generative power in nature.

*Madrasah* — Lit. School or educational institution.

*Mash* — A method of ceremonial purification, wiping.

*Maghâzi* — The books describing the battles fought by the Prophet.

*Maghrib* — The obligatory prayer offered just after the sunset.

*Mahavira* — 'The Venerable One', was the title of Vardhamana, the founder of Jainism.

*Mu'âmalah* — Dealing, includes such duties as are required between man and man, and covers all the various sections of civil jurisprudence.

*Muḥarram* — The first month of Islamic calendar.

*Musnad* — Lit. Supported; Name of certain collections of Prophetic traditions / sayings.

*Nirvana* — (A Hindu concept) An state of bliss or peace attained through release from all the hampering conditions of life in the phenomenal world of time and space.

*Ormuzd* — See *Ahura Mazda*.

*Ar-Rabb* — Allah, the Sustainer.

*Rak'ah* — A unit of prayer consisting of two prostrations and one genuflexion.

*Ramaḍân* — The ninth month of Islamic calendar when Muslims keep fast during the whole month.

*Ar-Ra'oof* — The Merciful, attributive name of Allah.

*Sha'bân* — The eighth month of Islamic calendar.

*Ṣaḥâbah* or *Aṣḥâb* — Pl. of *Ṣaḥâbi* or *Ṣâhib*; meaning Companion or associate of the Prophet.

*Sati* — (A Hindu concept) Immolation of the widows with the funeral pyre of the deceased husbands. The custom, since abolished, was in vogue till the beginning of the nineteenth century.

*Shari'ah* — The law based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (bpuh).

*Shiva* — Hindu Divinity representing the destroyer in the trinity in which *Brahma* is the creator and *Viṣṇu* is the preserver. *Durga* or *Kali* is his spouse.

*Aṣ-Ṣiḥâh as-Sittah* — The six authentic books of prophetic traditions/sayings recognized as such by the majority sects of Muslims. They are:

1. *Al-Jâmi' aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥ* of Muhammad ibn Ismâ'eel al-Bukhari
2. *Ṣaḥeeḥ* of Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjâj al-Qushayri
3. *Al-Jâmi'* of Muhammad ibn. 'Eesâ at-Tirmidhi
4. *Sunan* of Abu Dawood as-Sijistâni
5. *As-Sunan* of Aḥmad ibn. Shu'ayb an-Nasâ'i and
6. *Sunan* of Muhammad ibn. Yazeed ibn Mâjah

*Seerah* — See *Siyâr*.

*Siyâr* — Pl. of *Seerah*; The record of a man's actions and exploits. *Kitâb as-Siyâr* is the title given to biographies of the Prophet (bpuh).

*Shudra* — The lowest of the four castes among Hindus.

*Aṣ-Ṣuffah* — Certain poor Companions of the Prophet, without any place of abode, who claimed the promise of the Apostle and implored his protection. Thus the perch of the Prophet's mosque became their mansion and they came to be known as *Aṣḥâb aṣ-Ṣuffah* or 'the sitter on the bench'. They devoted themselves wholeheartedly to learning all about religion from the Prophet (bpuh).

*Sunnah* — Lit. Tradition or custom; The *Sunnah* represents an authentic saying, act or tacit approval of the Prophet to any act.

*Soorah* — A term used exclusively for the chapters of the Qur'an of which there are one hundred and fourteen, in number.

*Tâbi'een* — Sing. *Tâbi'ee*; Followers of the Companions of the Prophet (bpuh).

*Takleef Shar'ee* — The responsibility devolving on a person under the Islamic Law. One should be adult, sane, in good health and, in certain cases, such as zakah and Ḥajj, possessed of requisite funds, for being liable to perform a religious duty incumbent on a Muslim.

*Tahajjud* — A voluntary prayer offered after midnight.

*Tayammum* — Ablution performed with sand/ dust etc. when water is not available or cannot be used on grounds of ill-health, Dry ablution.

*Vishnu* — The Preserver, the second god of the Hindu Triad.

*Al-Wadood* — Lit. the Loving or the Friendly, the Affectionate; An Attributive name of Allah.

*Zakah* — Poor-due incumbent upon every adult Muslim possessed in full of a specified amount of property.

*Adh-Dhuhr* — The obligatory noon or mid-day prayer — Lit. Noon or noon time.

Definition for the symbol used:

(bpuh): Blessings and peace of Allah be upon him